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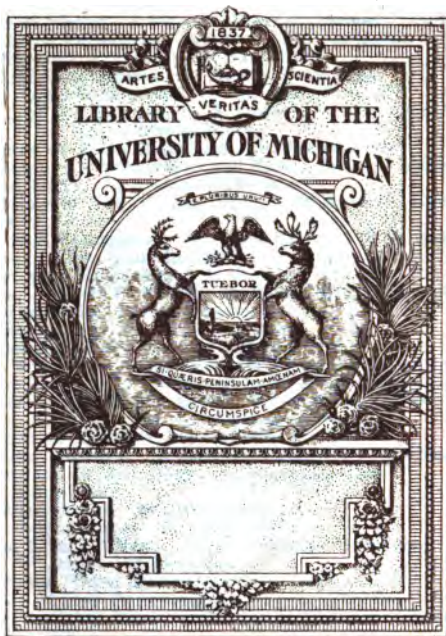
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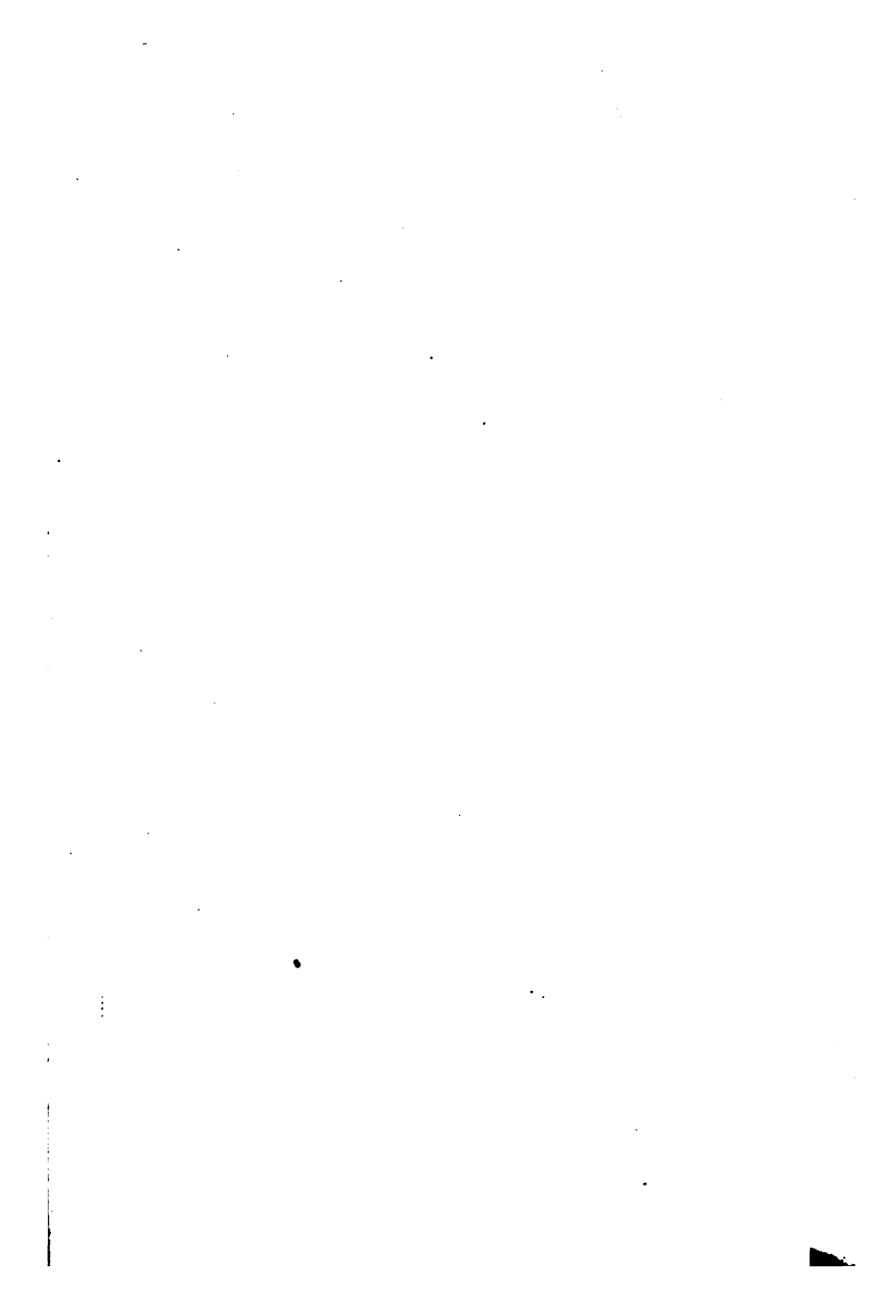
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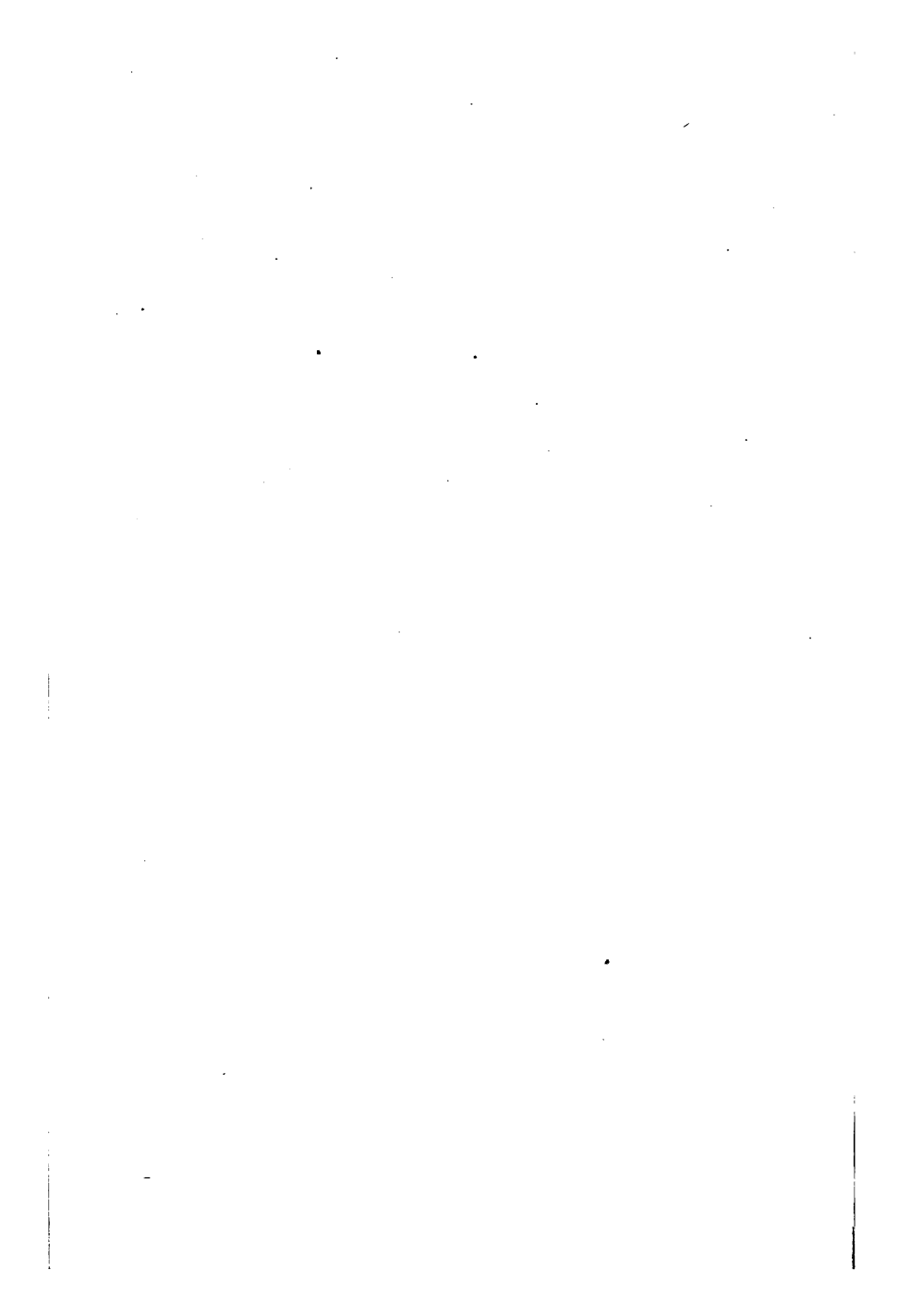
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ALINE



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

HENRY GRÉVILLE *1890*

BY REAR-ADMIRAL WILLIAM G. TEMPLE

Alone in the C. Temple

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1890



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ALINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE sky was growing green toward the west, above what had been a magnificent sunset; the trees in the Park of Versailles, in all the beauty of their August vigor, delineated themselves in one single somber mass against the transparency of the heavens, where two or three stars were already glittering. The hour was fresh, mysterious, soft.

A widow (of one day only) heaved a sigh, almost a sob; and, in the decreasing light, her thin hand sought the head of her daughter, who was seated beside her.

"Mamma, mamma!" said Aline, in a tone of reproach, "you promised me to be good!"

The door opened, and the old servant announced "Monsieur Leroy. Shall I bring in the lamp?" she asked at the same time.

"No," said the new-comer; "spare our eyes, Céleste; they have need of repose."

The door closed, and Monsieur Leroy approached the young woman. "Well!" he said to her, in a voice which he vainly endeavored to steady, "how goes it?"

"Thanks, my dear godfather," she answered, offering him her hand.

He gave her a paternal kiss on her forehead, kissed Aline on both cheeks, and seated himself near Madame Breton, in the embrasure of the windows. She pointed to the sky, without saying a word.

"Wonderful!" said he, in a low voice; "it is in vain to try to get accustomed to it, it is always so beautiful. Come, Julianne, how are you feeling?"

The widow turned toward him with swimming eyes, tried to speak, motioned with her hand to the dim stars, and burst into sobs. Standing upright, near her, her daughter gazed at her with an almost angry look.

"I know, I understand," murmured the excellent old man, affectionately pressing the hands of her whom he always called "little girl," although she was now past thirty-five; "Louis loved the fine skies, the beautiful views, the stars. You are thinking that he is up there, still higher up. You are right; but it is for that reason that you ought not to cry.—Aline, kiss your mamma."

The child passed her two arms around her mother's neck and kissed her with an air which savored of protection. She shed no tears, but since the day before a wrinkle had grown across her little round forehead.

"I have only her!" said the widow, with a sob.

"It is precisely on that account that you must not allow yourself to be pulled down," observed Monsieur Leroy.—"Aline, ring for Céleste to bring us the lamp. We have looked enough at the sky, Julianne; we have to talk seriously."

"Yes," said Madame Breton, making an effort to shake off her weariness. "Have you the accounts?"

I depended upon you for that horrible day. I can not pay you all at once ; but—”

“ It is not a question of that,” interrupted Monsieur Leroy, shutting the window.—“ Aline, kiss us and go to bed ; we have to talk on business.”

“ Papa would not send me away,” said the little girl, shortly.

She was large for her age ; one would have said she was fourteen, whereas she was just twelve. Her head-strong child’s brow, her obstinate mouth, her fine gray eyes, which were steady and a little hard, gave her almost the look of a young woman ; an appearance at once contradicted by the thinness of her limbs and the frailness of her figure. She was not precisely pretty ; but one could not predict what she would become.

“ Papa would not send you away ?” replied Monsieur Leroy, without being moved ; “ well, I send you away, because I am not your father. Go, my child ; try to sleep well ; and, above all, Aline—listen ! above all, never give pain to your mother ; she has enough trouble without that.”

Aline threw back her head with a little imperious gesture ; but, without resistance, she kissed Madame Breton very tenderly, presented her forehead to the old friend of the family, and disappeared behind Céleste, who carried the lamp.

Under this attenuated light the modest interior revealed itself to the eyes with freedom. It was the dwelling of a professor of the Lyceum, worker, stay-at-home body, and in his soul an artist. On the shelves, some favorite poets ; in a bureau, some sheets of verse, written at twenty years of age ; on the walls,

some painted sketches, on canvas or panel, always of scanty dimensions, as much because of the expense as by reason of the little time that Louis Breton could consecrate to his art.

To feel one's self painter and poet, and to be professor of Latin (sixth and fifth forms) in a provincial lyceum, what irony ! Yet Louis Breton had been happy ; he had lived in a dream since the hour when he had written his first verses, and that dated from far back ! Bachelor of Arts at sixteen, he had not thought, like so many others, that he could free himself from work under the pretext that he felt artistic aspirations ; son of a professor, he had become a professor, taking refuge first in poetry, afterward in painting, as in an ideal fortress, whose ditch the annoyances and small miseries of life could not pass over.

He had married, at twenty-five, a girl of twenty-two, who was nearly as rich as himself ; for she gave lessons at a boarding-school in the town where they had met each other. The birth of Aline had put an end to the young wife's work. The housekeeping had felt itself very much pinched at times, and there had been some terrible ends of the month ; but on Sundays, Louis took his easel, a folding stool, and a painter's umbrella, a present from his wife, acquired by means of repairs to an old black dress whose existence had been prolonged beyond all likelihood ; Julianne carried the child, and a small basket, in which, beside a box of colors, there was hidden a frugal lunch.

They went off, not very far, to a spot where a bit of meadow, a little water, a clump of trees, attracted the attention of the delicate artist ; Louis worked several hours ; Aline, lying on her back, gazed at the

clouds careering across the blue sky, while sweetly mewling the little chant which happy infants usually sing; and then they all returned to the house. During the evening, Louis looked from time to time at his new study, compared it with the old ones; his wife encouraged him, admired him, adored him; and their little troubles, their embarrassments, sometimes their poverty, flew away then, far away in the blue, without leaving any traces in their exalted spirits or their kindly souls.

Aline had grown; their circumstances had become a little better; Louis Breton had been called to Versailles. But the young professor, while fulfilling all his duties in a satisfactory manner, was not quite sustained by his superiors, nor quite liked by his colleagues. A professor of Latin, who practices painting, at least if he has not been declared a positive genius (and that is a thing which it is not easy to declare in his lifetime), will always be reckoned out of order. One may pardon him, one may even willingly glorify him for writing books; the "humanities" have produced a number of estimable authors; but painting! what a singular idea! what connection is there between them?

Louis Breton had died almost unexpectedly in mid-summer, of an inflammation of the lungs, suddenly changed into galloping consumption. He had not had time to suffer, or, above all, to make him uneasy; death had cut him off with his scythe, as one cuts off a rose with his scissors, and had carried him away to the blue regions of which he had always been dreaming; and he could not have found much difference between that and his dreams, except that, here below, he had the double joy of his wife and his child.

This is what the widow and her old friend said to each other in short phrases, full of unexpressed meaning of called-up recollections, immediately lapsing into silence. These dissimilar beings had loved each other for a long time. Leroy, a friend older than Julienne's father, had also been her godfather; and he had never lost sight of this godchild, whose simple goodness was to him like a flower.

Chance had made a tradesman of this man, whom a very lively taste had inclined to literature. He had soon understood that, to be independent, one must be rich; he had therefore sought to become rich. His wife, whom he had married for love, as poor as himself, but pretty, refined, and intelligent, had bravely seconded him; between them they put within reach of every one an object which had been hitherto reserved for rich women only, although, up to that time, it had been hideous and shapeless: they invented the cheap fan.

This was a revolution from which Parisian commerce profits largely to-day; but merely to make a fortune did not suffice to these people of taste. Leroy dreamed of something more artistic; he conceived the idea of appealing to the celebrated draftsmen of his time, and he was soon able to offer to a *clientèle* of crowned heads leaves of vellum magnificently mounted and signed Devéria, Tony Johannot, or Gavarni. One could never know whether Leroy was most proud at seeing queens and archduchesses coming into his shop, or at addressing as "my friend" those artists whose wants he knew how to guess, and at need to anticipate. His house at Nogent was always open to any one who had a reputation in painting, or music, or literature;

and he received during thirty years, together with celebrities of good quality, many brilliant bohemians who amused him.

It was in this way that he came to know Julianne's father; and when the young girl wished to marry, he approved her choice, and at once took Louis Breton into his friendship. More than one water-color was bought very opportunely for the young household; and the little Aline learned to walk during the vacations in the same garden-walks at Nogent where Béranger often promenaded while seeking to compose a song.

It was for these reasons that, in the hour of her great trial, Julianne had called this old friend to her aid. He was no longer young in fact, and yet a little feebleness in the shoulders, and a little heaviness in his gait, would hardly have betrayed his seventy years. The death of his wife, the marriage of his son, and still more the cessation of his active tradesman's life, had rapidly aged him; but his mind was more alert than ever. Like oxen, that never move quickly but never stop, he made twenty or twenty-five kilometres in a day, with pruning-shears or measure in hand, and in overlooking his immense garden, and the numerous houses which he never ceased building all around him, in order to rent at moderate prices to lovers of suburban village life.

At this age, in all the maturity of his wisdom, tempered by a prodigious fund of indulgent philosophy, Pierre Leroy was certainly an excellent counselor for a woman still young, without resources and charged with a child very difficult to govern. But he had quite decided not to pronounce upon anything before having

sounded the secret thoughts of his godchild ; he therefore questioned her with extreme prudence, penetrating into Julianne's mind and obliging her to render an account of her feelings.

"At bottom," said he, when he thought himself to be sufficiently enlightened, "what troubles you most is not the present, it is the future?"

"The future, if it were only for myself, would torment me but little ! With your aid, my friend, I could always earn enough to feed and bring up my daughter ! But what troubles me is Aline's future welfare !"

Leroy fixed his blue, piercing eyes on Julianne, and she continued in a constrained way :

"The future welfare of Aline, don't you see, is my eternal care ! When Louis was here, I was sometimes frightened at this unknown, impenetrable future ; and then I would say to myself that he would know well how to subdue this difficult character. She loved him dearly, yes—dearly. But now, alone—I no longer know—" She buried her agitated face in her hands.

"Don't cry," said father Leroy in his clear voice and with his slow speech ; she raised her head and looked at him. "One must not cry," continued he, "if one would have his ideas clear ; and we have need of being explicit. What is your situation ?"

The widow sadly shook her head.

"No pension ? Too young, evidently. No relatives who could help ?"

"An uncle of Louis's, rich, who has children, and who does not like me—"

"Nothing, then," finished Leroy. "The expense of that sad day's work amounts to eight hundred and seventy francs and ten centimes. Here are the re-

ceipted bills. You owe me nothing ; don't thank me."

"I must, nevertheless," said Julienne, with a movement toward him.

"No," said he, quieting her with a gesture. "I have never lent you money, because you would not have been able to repay it ; I have never given you any, because that would have looked like charity ; but that which one does not offer to the living one can give to the dead : I place this on the tomb of your husband, my lamented friend, Louis Breton."

He spoke with a certain pompousness arising from his emotion, and at the same time with a sort of commercial clearness, which gave to his speech quite an odd accent. Julienne answered with a nod of the head, which meant thanks ; but kept silence, understanding that he wished it.

"You have no money," continued he, "but no debts either ! Very well. Here are three hundred francs ; with that you can get along some time. I lend it to you ; you shall pay it back when you have earned some money. And in the mean time tell me what do you intend for your daughter ? "

Madame Breton hesitated a little.

"Her father found in her an aptitude for drawing," said she at last ; "I believe he would have liked to make an artist of her. For my part, I would have prepared to train her for teaching. One does not grow rich on it, but one is almost sure of gaining one's bread at least. Her father's name would have served as a recommendation ; and you, who know so many people—"

"It is you who are right about it," said Monsieur

Leroy, quietly. "As an artist, I should have been able to get her some fans to paint, for the house—I still have a little influence there, although it no longer belongs to me." He sighed like a weary man. "But that is not bread. That would be all; at most butter, if one already had the bread. Let her pass her examinations; let her take her license; and then I can be of service to her."

"You know so many people!" murmured Julienne. "Then you think I should urge her in that direction?"

"I vouch for it. And you—what will you do?"

"Look for pupils; I had some, I will find some again—if you will help me."

"Certainly," said Leroy, without showing much enthusiasm for this idea. "Shall you leave this apartment, and go to Paris, in the month of October?"

"I must do so!" answered the widow, who had never thought of it.

"I will look out for something for you. At present, the great question: Aline must be placed at a boarding-school."

"Aline!" said the frightened mother. "But that is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible, my dear child—except to prevent people from dying. You can not bring up your daughter."

"Why?"

"For several reasons. In the first place, what will you do with her while you are giving lessons?"

"There are day-schools."

"That may be. Then, there is another reason. Do you expect, alone, to work out her character?"

"She is very good and very affectionate," began Julienne.

He interrupted her "Very good? That may be; I have had no proofs to the contrary. Very affectionate for you? No. I don't want to cause you pain, Julienne; that would be a useless cruelty at this moment; but, believe me, you have not the force to bring up your daughter, all alone."

"You will help me," said Julienne, in a tone which was an admission.

"I? I have never been able to bring up anybody, not even a poodle!" replied Leroy, with an irony which was not free from bitterness. "No; the regular discipline of a good boarding-school—"

"There are none," interrupted Julienne, in a disheartened tone.

"Not many, I agree; but one can find some," replied Monsieur Leroy, who never lost the thread of his discourse. "The discipline of a good boarding-school will get the better of that rather bohemian side in Aline's nature; and you will enjoy a greater freedom of mind, to devote yourself to your work."

"What loneliness!" sighed the widow. "To return to an empty house, and go to sleep without having even pressed a friendly hand! No, my good, dear godfather; I beg of you, not that!"

"Ah! well—we will see," tranquilly answered the old man, who had a singular tenacity under an apparent mildness. "Don't worry yourself, Julienne, I beg of you; and, above all, don't spoil your daughter. The happiness of both of you depends upon the first days which you are going to pass together alone. And now, it is time for the train; I must go." With a few com-

forting words he left Madame Breton. His old heart bled for her, as he went slowly toward the station—not only for the present, which was so painful, but for the future ; that terrible future assuredly preoccupied his mind more than it tormented Julianne herself.

“After all,” said he, while the train carried him away toward Paris, “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof !”

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning, when Madame Breton awoke in her widow's chamber, her first uncertain glance encountered so many dear objects that she felt herself overcome by irrepressible tears. The sobs, crowding in her throat, seemed to suffocate her. A small erect figure stood before her, with a severe mouth and a wrinkle between the eyes.

"Mamma ! mamma !" said Aline, with a tone of very grave discontent.

Her mother gazed at her with stupor. So tall, so slender, in her night-dress, which fell to her feet, she seemed like an angel in an Italian fresco.

"You promised me to be good," said she ; "you must not cry."

"A little—only a little," sobbed Julianne ; "without that I should choke. O my husband !"

She buried her head under the bedclothes and cried at her ease. Aline gazed at her with a concentrated look : she had no desire to cry, herself ; she was rather put in a passion. After a minute of silent waiting, she placed her hands rather roughly on her mother's shoulder. Julianne started up immediately, pushed back the long tresses of her brown hair, and, while repressing the nervous shivers of her sobs, too suddenly stifled, she seated herself on the side of her bed.

Aline helped her, in silence, to go on with her toilet; Madame Breton mechanically allowed her to do so. All at once she perceived that her daughter was still in her night-dress, with her naked feet in slippers.

"You are not dressed!" she said with solicitude.

"I was waiting for the moment when you should awake," answered Aline, briefly. "Since then, I have not had the time."

The feeling of her motherly duty quite aroused Madame Breton, while at the same time she felt a little hurt. A less independent Aline, less helpful—more "her daughter," in a word—would have given her more comfort at this moment. In the mean time she could not misunderstand the interest which had dictated this sort of superintendence. Her first impulse had been an instinct of revolt; the second was an access of tenderness. She pressed the little slender form against her heart.

"Dress yourself quickly," said she, kissing her; "I shall be ready in five minutes."

Aline obeyed without saying a word.

A little before two o'clock there was a ring at the bell; the voice of Céleste was heard to utter an exclamation, a light hubbub followed, and the old servant entered Julianne's chamber without knocking, where she was making out her accounts.

"Think of it, madame; here is Madame Dalibaud, who has come quite express from Fontainebleau!" said she in a joyous tone.

Julianne got up in haste and ran into the dining-room, where she fell into her friend's arms.

"I received the letter too late," said the latter, kiss-

ing her over and over again. "You did not doubt me? Say, my dear Julienne."

Madame Breton made a sign that she did not. To tell the truth, she had not thought for an instant of her friend, in the disorder of the preceding days. Roberta Dalibaud had been the companion of her childhood; but chance and marriage had separated them by an enormous ditch, almost a river. And yet, the rich heiress, richly married too, had never ceased to recall herself to the recollection of her old comrade. They had been friends at that very short period of youth when generous souls take no account of social distances. Their friendship, grown a little dim, had soon become an affectionate habit. After having written often, they had got to writing seldom; but, once or twice a year, they had still exchanged friendly letters, on all the important occasions of life; and from time to time, once every two or three years, Madame Dalibaud had come to see her old comrade for an hour, which soon slipped away.

"It is the insufferable way in the country," resumed Madame Dalibaud; "there is but one mail-delivery a day; and you can not imagine how that makes one commit rudeness, and hinders one's movements. My poor dear, I ought to have been here yesterday. I did not learn the sad news until noon, when it was too late to try to come; but this morning I took the eight o'clock train; I snatched a hasty breakfast in Paris; and here I am. This is your daughter? So large already?"

She looked at Aline with astonishment, not expecting to find her such a "young lady"; nor, perhaps, so remarkable. Aline, for her part, could not keep her

eyes off the handsome, elegant person, whose every movement was distinguished ; who had a pleasant odor (not too much), and whose toilet had an indefinable stamp of good taste, without excluding richness. Aline did not know much of the world ; but she felt instinctively that if she had a hundred thousand francs' income, and had come to see her friend, a widow of only two days, she would have worn exactly such a dress and bonnet as those Madame Dalibaud had on.

With a circumspect and supple gesture, the visitor drew the child to her, bent the fine head under her lips, and dropped a kiss on her forehead, who did not shrink from it. Aline had the impression that a little of the perfume which Madame Dalibaud had about her, must have remained on her hair.

"She is very pretty," said the latter. "Fourteen years old? No. It is true, only twelve, I know ; we were married almost at the same time. And now widows, both of us ! What a trial, my poor Julianne !"

Madame Breton recollected the defunct Monsieur Dalibaud, who had been a large, fat man with a loud voice and a high color, a notable merchant, charmed with himself ; and she said to herself that, between her trial and that of her old friend, there existed no analogy. However, the good-will of the visitor was so evident that she could not do otherwise than show her some gratitude.

"It is very sweet of you to have come over here at once," said Julianne. "Do you live at Fontainebleau during the summer?"

"Yes, always ; I have a very comfortable country-house on the banks of the Seine ; it is very pretty about there. You know you are not going to remain

here alone with this child ; I am going to carry you both off."

"Oh!" cried Julianne, instinctively drawing back. This proposition seemed like sacrilege to her—thus to leave the walls where the last sigh of her husband had taken its flight!

"You must. A change is necessary in such a case ; if my good aunt had not carried me away to the south four years ago, when I had the misfortune to lose poor Monsieur Dalibaud, I should certainly have died of grief. I understand your repugnance, my dear friend ; yes, it is very hard to leave the house where— But it is necessary, as much in your daughter's interest as in your own. How do you call her?"

"Aline."

"Aline," repeated Madame Dalibaud. In spite of her extreme politeness, she hadn't the courage to approve so rustic and unfashionable a name. "Ah, well ! in the interests of Aline. Will you come with me, Aline?"

"It would do good to mamma," answered the child.

She was fascinated with Madame Dalibaud, who was almost as much so herself with the bearing and the natural attitude of this young open-air plant. Notwithstanding her irreproachable distinction, Madame Breton must have appeared, in the eyes of an elegant woman, a little dull and aged ; but this statuette of the middle ages was really very remarkable in her simple black dress.

"She has a sweet voice," said Madame Dalibaud ; "and, moreover, she is right. Come, Aline, we two will carry off this refractory mother. Pack up a small valise ; your servant will send the rest to-morrow."

Aline disappeared while her mother was protesting.

Madame Breton felt the uselessness of her protestations; what could she urge against a thought so generous, and expressed with a heartiness which took away from it any offensive appearance of patronage? The reasons which made her wish to remain at home were not such as one can express; such things are felt, are understood, but one does not explain them in a high and audible voice.

"Come, a week only," said Madame Dalibaud in conclusion; "a week, if you don't care to give me more; but I am going to carry you off.—Céleste," said she, opening the kitchen-door, "go and look for a carriage; we have no time to lose if we wish to sleep at the Orangery."

Céleste understood at once, and was delighted at the idea of seeing "madame" snatched away from the midst of this black sadness. As she rushed out into the street, she nearly ran against Monsieur Leroy.

"Hurry up, monsieur," she cried to him in passing; "the ladies are going to leave."

Leroy entered the apartment, of which the door stood open, without ringing. On seeing him, Julienne gave a little cry. Why had he not come an hour sooner!

"You are going away?" said the old man, saluting the ladies. Madame Dalibaud looked at him.

"Monsieur Leroy!" said she, with her easy grace, "I have bought many a pretty fan of you; or rather it was of the charming Madame Leroy. Is she well?"

"I had the misfortune to lose her several years ago, madame; but I thank you none the less for your kind remembrance.—Are you going away, Julienne?"

"It is I who am carrying her off," said the visitor, in no wise disconcerted. "I am Madame Dalibaud."

"I had the honor of knowing your late husband," replied Leroy. "We were on the jury together at Vienna, in 1873."

They bowed to each other.

"I am taking home with me your goddaughter and her child. They need change of air."

"I have come for them," answered Monsieur Leroy simply.

Julienne cast at him a suppliant look. She would have preferred to go with him, to his house at Nogent, which was so quiet.

"I have the priority," said Madame Dalibaud, always smiling. "These ladies belong to me, and I will take good care of them. To console yourself, you must come to see them at my house."

A fresh look from Julienne was understood by her old friend.

"It will be an honor and a pleasure to me," said he, with a gallantry a little antiquated, but touching in its simple dignity. "We will talk together of the late Monsieur Dalibaud, whom I knew and esteemed—"

"The carriage is ready," interrupted Céleste, out of breath with having to run up-stairs.

The group descended. Julienne, remaining a little behind, whispered in her godfather's ear, "You will go?—say."

"Yes, my dear child, I will go to see him. Your husband shall have flowers during your absence; and I will go to see you too. I am an old retired gentle-

man myself ; and I have nothing to do. Till we meet again, mesdames."

While the carriage drove away, he remained thoughtful ; then, with his slow steps, instead of going toward the railway station, he went to the cemetery.

CHAPTER III.

JULIENNE, seated on a bench, was looking at the Seine, running past below her.

The garden-wall of the Orangery, which formed a terrace at this spot, was very elegantly crowned with a stone balustrade, ornamented with pilasters, supporting large metal vases, full of geranium-ivy whose falling branches were softly stirred by the breeze.

It was a rustic but rich setting; nothing to do but to rake, daily, the walks of this vast garden—almost a park. A practiced eye recognized the necessity of two gardeners at least. The fruit garden was not very extensive; nearly all having been given up to ornament.

Monsieur Dalibaud, while living, had clearly expressed his wishes. "I am rich enough to buy vegetables, and indeed fruits, and I only appreciate the earliest; but I wish that my park should be the finest in the vicinity."

His landscape-gardener had taken him at his word. What a godsend! and how one could sell dear, to this silk-merchant, the rare trees which go to make up "a fine park," such as any man, who knew nothing about it, could easily understand! The Orangery was quite an old house; and the garden, if regularly laid out, would readily have recalled the grand period; but they turned everything topsy-turvy, laid out mounds

and hollows, planted the poor ground which could not help it; all in order that the house, as seen from the road, should possess, to the left, a *Wellingtonia gigantea*, which gave it the appearance of having a black eye; and for symmetry, as seen from the river, there was, on the right side, a massive *eucalyptus*, which constantly refused to put forth leaves, and (always renewed, but always obstinate) gave to this part of the garden a very Australian appearance of "brush."

The terrace alone remained intact; in the first place they did not know exactly how to change it, and then the geranium-ivy, so often broken by the wind, required to be replaced so frequently that the gardener got his profit out of it. It was a spot very little frequented; Madame Dalibaud had never taken a liking to it, and Julienne had made it her favorite walk during the ten days she had been at the Orangery.

She was dreaming, while gazing at the water as it flowed by, of the things of her youth. The acuteness of her grief had become a little dulled in these new surroundings, far from familiar objects. She was uneasy, out of her element in this place; but she had certainly suffered less here, or perhaps in another way, than in her apartment at Versailles. The recollections of her love, of her happiness as a young bride, had little by little revived in her memory; and, without ceasing to mourn her husband, she had said to herself that, after all, she had made him as happy as was in her power.

One can not imagine the balm which such a thought brings to a delicate and tender soul who mourns a beloved object; as much as the idea that one may have saddened him who is no more, as much as the

recollection of irreparable faults committed toward an adored memory, are a pitiless remorse; so much does the just feeling of a continuous effort toward soothing and joy repose the heart and sweeten the mourning. Without having yet altogether got beyond the period of unreasonable, invincible despair, Julianne had begun to cherish the recollection of the happy hours of an irrevocable past.

She recalled with a particular sweetness their sojourn at Nogent, in the early days of their marriage. The big house, always as full as a pigeon-house, had suddenly found itself deserted that year; a happy chance had sent some abroad, and some to the sea-bathing. Seized with a sudden idea, Leroy had written to the newly married pair: "My house is lonely, all by itself, and the old cook must not spoil his hand. Come quickly, both of you, my children; come and make for me some green-gage preserves, otherwise we shall have none to eat this winter."

The young people had well understood what all that meant. They came; and Julianne had faithfully superintended the preparation of enormous jars of preserves.

How happy they had been in this singular house, which had been since pulled down, to give place to another still larger, more elegant, but less friendly, and less pleasant to live in! It had been like a hive, a compound of cells tacked on one to the other, in any order whatever, separated by corridors; the stairs opened from one leaf of a doorway, of which the other leaf covered the shelves where the sweetmeats, which were classic in this family, stood in all their glory. So that an absent-minded guest, having mistaken the leaf one

evening, had walked straight into a bowl of apple-jelly.

They had laughed over this for a long time; and at the memory of it now, Julienne, in spite of her sadness, could not repress a smile.

A heavy step sounded on the gravel. She turned and saw Monsieur Leroy, accompanied by a servant, who retired at once.

"I was thinking of you, dear godfather," said she, drawing aside her dress to make room for him; "I was recalling the old house."

"Do you remember it?" said the old man with a tranquil smile. "The young people have forgotten it very quickly; it is not so very long ago, however. They gave me no peace until it came down! I was very fond of it; it was like our fortune, which grew little by little; and I used to meet there, in every corner, the story of some fine day's work of my youth. Now, one would say that the world asked only to forget."

Julienne silently placed her hand on that of her old friend.

"Not everybody; no," resumed he, "not you, and not me. It is very pretty here; the garden, down there, is a little too modern for my taste; that is a superb *Wellingtonia*. They forced me to plant one on my lawn at Nogent; they pretended that I was the only one who had none, and that it was humiliating. For my part, it is all the same to me. I call it an imperfect fir-tree; and besides, it doesn't seem to flourish. At bottom, I am glad of it. When it becomes too ugly, we will pull it up."

"What will you put in its place?" asked Julienne, absently.

"I? nothing at all! Isn't the view enough? A view the like of which there are not ten in the vicinity of Paris! Hills, trees, the river, an immense horizon, and the good Lord's sky! That is worth more than a *Wellingtonia*, even a *gigantea*. Where is Aline?"

"Somewhere in the garden. Madame Dalibaud has gone out."

"I know; they told me so. When are you coming to see me?"

Julienne's face brightened. "Whenever you wish," she answered, with a vivacity which surprised even herself. She colored, and added: "Do not think that I am uncomfortable here, at least; but, you know, I am always more at my ease with you."

"I hope so, indeed. Then it is agreed. When?"

"I must go back to Versailles," said Julienne; "and then we will go to Nogent."

"You have no need to go back to Versailles," said Leroy in his placid tone. "There are fresh flowers placed there every other day. I found a very good gardener, who attends to that for me."

"But I—"

"You—you shall go, if you wish, to pass an afternoon at your house; but you must leave your daughter with me, and you must return the same evening. That will be better. It is all arranged."

Madame Breton answered nothing; this arrangement satisfied her. She had wished, ever since her widowhood, to have a moment of real solitude, to be all alone by herself.

The presence of her daughter was a constraint upon her, because of the attitude taken by the child from the day after her father's death. This character of protect-

ress of a reasonable person, which had at first seemed touching to the depressed widow, accorded too well with Aline's natural disposition for her not to endeavor to keep it up. Being very shrewd, she had reduced it to the merest shadow in the eyes of strangers; Madame Dalibaud saw nothing in it but the proof of a tender solicitude; but Madame Breton felt herself watched, and even closely.

This supervision, which had had no reason to manifest itself except to avoid the danger of explosions of grief, more and more rare, applied itself now to all of Julianne's acts. One would have said that her daughter, having been but little acquainted with her hitherto, was studying to understand her, to penetrate her. The task was not arduous; the poor woman had never made a mystery of that exquisite modesty of the soul which is often hidden even from the dearest ones. Julianne's simplicity and frankness, often quite artless, rendered her very easy to know; the evident scrutiny which her daughter brought to bear upon her slightest act, her slightest word, became very soon a burden. But what could she say? How explain to Aline that her mother, her own mother, was suffering from her solicitude? There was needed, in order to solve this delicate problem, a freedom of mind which Julianne could not lay hold of. Leroy's proposal, therefore, suited her absolutely, and she accepted it without further hesitation.

"Here is Aline," she said, looking behind her.

Aline came forward; she had grown, even during the week; and her very sedate carriage made her appear still larger. Seeing her mother's friend, she approached, presented her forehead to him to kiss, and

then seated herself in front of him, on the edge of an orange-box. Her sharp glance went from her mother to Leroy, including them in an equal interest.

"Are you enjoying yourself here?" asked Leroy, fixing his blue eyes on her.

Aline's gaze, after a little struggle, fell under that of the old man.

She answered in a surly tone, "Very much."

"So much the better," said Leroy, in a good-natured tone. "I hope that your taste for the country will follow you to Nogent, where you are coming next week."

"To-day is Saturday," said Aline, almost frightened.

"Precisely. On Sunday there are too many people for you—that would not suit; but on Monday I shall expect you to dinner."

Aline did not answer; but looking at her mother, said, "You know that, on Monday, Madame Dalibaud wishes to take us to the Gorges of Apremont?"

Leroy pretended not to have heard; and, anticipating Julianne's answer, he handed her a little card which he had taken from his pocket.

"Here is the connection of the trains," said he. "You, see I have marked those which you can take. That of four o'clock is the most convenient; but, if you wish to stop in Paris, there are others. I shall be at the station to receive you. Good-by, my children."

He got up. Madame Breton stopped him with a gesture. "You can not go without having seen Madame Dalibaud; and I know that she will keep you to dinner."

"Precisely," said he, drawing out his watch. "I

have a carriage at the door, and I must return by it. There is a train now. That is why I am going."

But retreat was cut off. Madame Dalibaud was coming toward them.

Certainly that amiable woman had offered hospitality to her friend with a quite spontaneous generosity, and each day she had applauded herself the more in seeing a light rose-color rising more and more in the cheeks of both mother and daughter ; but the meals seemed to her a little stiff, seasoned only with their conversation—a conversation of which Aline bore the principal part—and she had no mind to allow such an agreeable guest as Monsieur Leroy to escape.

"I have just sent away your coachman, monsieur," she said, approaching him. "You shall go back by the nine o'clock train ; and orders have been given to hurry up the dinner a little. So you are my prisoner."

"Allow me, then, madame, to kiss the hand that has captured me," replied Leroy at once, without being moved.

He carried the hand which Madame Dalibaud had offered him to his lips, and the little group turned toward the house. Aline stared with open eyes ; Monsieur Leroy went up many cubits in her estimation. She was a little girl of a spirit at once fanciful and positive, however contradictory these two dispositions may seem to be ; she dreamed grandly, but measured realities almost to the inch. Never having seen her mother's godfather except in intimacy, she had not imagined that this little fat old man could all at once become a fine gentleman. She listened to his conversation, saw him move about, with a surprise that would have been comical but for the extreme care with which

she concealed it. Madame Dalibaud and Monsieur Leroy played a comedy for her, so to speak ; the innocent coquetry of a pretty woman of thirty-six, or seven, with a respectable septuagenarian, seemed to her more amusing than the best-arranged story. This was not the way that professors and their wives talked, when they found themselves thrown together ; one would rather have called them personages of the olden time, such as she had seen on bonbon-boxes or fans. Fans ! It was there, no doubt, that Monsieur Leroy had picked up his fine manners ! Aline was not capable of guessing that this old beau had, all his life, adored women ; and that, faithful to his sentiments, he would remain to the end an enthusiastic devotee to feminine grace.

Julienne, accustomed to his ways, took no notice of them ; the presence of her old friend had nevertheless roused her a little from her torpor, and the dinner was more lively than usual. The fruit reddened in the baskets, the golden wine sparkled in the glasses ; Madame Dalibaud had placed a flower in her corsage ; the setting sun powdered the obstinate eucalyptus with gold, as seen through the dining-room window ; and the measured sound of old Leroy's fine repartees alternated with the silvery laughter of the charming woman.

"That must be the way it is in the world !" suddenly thought Aline, who felt herself older, by at least fifteen months, at this unforeseen revelation.

After dinner, they took Monsieur Leroy to the station. Madame Dalibaud had caused the landau to be harnessed, and the four friends installed themselves comfortably in it, Aline facing the old man, whom she never ceased from staring at curiously. A little tired

by the heat of the day, and by the excitement of the dinner, he remained silent ; but his keen eyes saw more than any one would have suspected. When the carriage dropped him before the station at Fontainebleau, in the hubbub of arrivals and departures, he discharged a ringing "On Monday" at Madame Breton, saluted the three ladies with a regency sweep of his hat, and disappeared in the midst of the crowd.

"On Monday?" repeated Madame Dalibaud, while the coachman took the way back to the Orangery.

"Yes. I have promised him to go and spend several days at Nogent, before returning home," said Julienne, by way of excuse.

She expected reproaches. For three or four days, every time she had made allusion to her departure, her friend accused her of not loving her enough. Madame Dalibaud, indeed, exclaimed a little, but only for form's sake, at which Julienne felt a great relief. At the contact with a man whose amiable gallantry awoke in her all the instincts of a woman of the world, the pretty woman had felt how much the mourning of her friends was a suffocating affair ; and a vehement desire to fly away to some lively sea-side resort, such as Tronville or Dieppe, had seized upon her like a veritable madness. While the springs of her landau were rocking her over the roads, shaded by oaks which made it already almost dark, she was asking herself how she could politely disembarass herself of her guests, whom she had so strongly insisted upon keeping. It was a real service which Julienne rendered her in going ; and she showed her a genuine gratitude for it by her caresses.

The next day Madame Dalibaud found a thousand

ingenious ways of rendering this last day agreeable to those who were going to leave her. Aline said nothing, but remained morose.

"Will you give me Aline, for a fortnight, at the seaside?" suddenly said Roberta to her friend.

The proposition was no sooner formulated than she regretted it greatly. What could she do with this child in mourning? Here was an incumbrance wholly useless. Happily Julianne reassured her. "How can you think of such a thing?" said she. "It is not a fortnight since her father died!"

"That is true!" said Madame Dalibaud, sweetly. "It will be for another time."

She saw them leave with a mixture of pleasure and regret. "I will not keep them so long the next time," she thought. "Twelve days is too much."

Aline sprang upon her neck in leaving, with an effusion by which she was touched; and she promised herself to procure some pleasure, later, to this original child.

In the cars, the young girl kept quite silent, evidently very much absorbed.

"What are you thinking of?" asked her mother, quite astonished at not finding herself the object of the girl's attention.

"Of Madame Dalibaud. She is an accomplished woman!" resolutely answered the young person.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME BRETON had started for Versailles at nine o'clock in the morning, leaving Aline to Leroy's care.

"You can leave Aline to look out for me," he had said, on seeing his goddaughter leave. "I am going to try to be very good ; so that she shall not have any reports to make against me, this evening, when you return."

The hidden malice in these words, apparently so insignificant, had caused a rush of blood to mount to the young girl's cheeks. Ever since she had left the banks of the Seine for those of the Marne, she had seen herself exposed by the sly old man ; and from time to time, some word, of which she alone understood the secret irony, inflicted upon her the sharp little wound of a lightly barbed arrow.

"Why do you tease me, monsieur ? " said she, when, her mother having disappeared at the turn of the road, they slowly retraced their way to the house.

"Call me grandfather," replied Leroy, without being excited ; "as a matter of fact, you have never known either grandfather or grandmother ; I will fill up a blank in your existence."

Aline meditated an instant ; then, resolutely making up her mind, she said : "You loved my father, and you

love my mother; tell me, grandfather, why do you not love me?"

The pruning-shears in Leroy's hand, which cut off a faded rose, made a very dry "click" to be heard.

"Why do you say that I do not love you?" answered the excellent man, tying up the support of a rose-bush, which was too loose.

"That is evident," answered Aline, ready to cry, but holding back her tears with a surprising firmness.

"You do not see it clearly enough," resumed the old man, continuing his tranquil walk. He cut a branch here, a bit of dead wood there, tied up or loosened a plant according to the occasion, performing the duties of gardener, and producing at need ends of twine most unexpectedly. "You are wrong to say that I do not love you, Aline. If I didn't love you, you would not be here, where I have never suffered people who do not please me. You are sharp, however, and you have perceived that of you two I prefer your mother, and very much so. As you are not without a bit of jealousy, this annoys you, and I understand it. But take notice that I have known your mother for thirty-five years, and you for only twelve, which makes a certain difference."

Aline walked silently by his side, stopping when he stopped, listening to his words very attentively, in which she sought some hidden meaning.

"You are laughing at me, grandfather," said she, emphasizing the familiar appellation, in order to show that she wished to humor him. "It is not the number of years that makes you love me so much less than mamma."

"You said 'mamma' that time? I am very glad of

it. You had taken to calling her 'my mother,' which gave you a little air of ceremony—very distinguished, but not affectionate. In the mouth of a woman, you see, 'mamma' is the tenderest word that can be pronounced—and sometimes in that of a man—of an old man," added he in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

Aline listened to him with a deference full of interest. He continued, always as if to himself alone :

"I saw one day, at the hospital, one of my workmen, who had had a carriage accident, and who was going to die. He was at least fifty years old, and his old mother was beside him—she was at least seventy-five—and he said to her, 'Mamma ! mamma !' and it was not ridiculous—no, not ridiculous at all."

He abruptly thrust his closed pruning-shears into his jacket-pocket, and took some steps in silence. Aline had suddenly felt her throat choked with a new emotion, altogether unknown ; if she had dared, she would have kissed him. But there was, in the depths of this young girl, one does not know what ideal of conventionality which constantly paralyzed her better impulses.

They were climbing a rather steep slope, and Leroy was obliged to stop in the middle to breathe. He turned toward the valley which extended below them, full of running waters, of poplars, of gardens, of elegant or ordinary houses, and gazed at them a long time.

"That, look you," said he, "is a book ; when you are of my age, you will comprehend all that I have read there during the forty years I have been looking at it."

He resumed his slow march ; she followed him docilely, charmed, almost fascinated, and a little fearful,

as in all fascination. Madame Dalibaud was very far from her mind at this moment ; she would have liked to ask a hundred questions, but she could not form a single one.

"Your father loved this book," resumed Leroy, when they had gained the terrace, where they could walk without getting out of breath, "because he knew how to read it. And you—do you see anything in it?"

Aline did not answer ; she was not interested in nature. What she liked in the garden was the good order, the air of luxury—that is, the result obtained ; that profound love of real things which gnaws at the artist's heart had not even grazed hers. Altogether, she sought for appearances rather than for depth.

"You have a taste for sketching," resumed Leroy ; "have you tried to draw from nature?"

"It is portraits that I like," answered she, rather abruptly.

"Your father was a born landscape-painter. But that is nothing ; one can be a great painter, perhaps a much greater painter, in making a single head, than—no matter whom. Only, one must love nature—the sky the trees, the grass, and everything—everything!"

"I like gardens," observed Aline.

"That is a beginning. Later you will like forests. It is necessary to love everything in the world, to understand everything, the great and the small, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad—"

"To love the bad?" said Aline.

"To pity it, soothe it, or help it if one can. That is how to love it. Pity, don't you see, Aline, is perhaps the grandest thing in the world!"

She listened, but did not understand. Pity seemed to her rather contemptuous. She had not yet opened her soul to the fountains of indulgence. Indulgence is not one of the virtues of youth. Leroy remembered this, and talked to her of other things.

"Are you ambitious?" asked he, suddenly.

Aline's eyes sparkled, and immediately fell. Yes, she was prodigiously ambitious; but there are so many kinds of ambition!

"You would like to be celebrated?"

She bowed her head. It was the secret dream of her young existence, born of an imprudent word, one day pronounced by her father, on some sketch of hers, which he had thought promising.

"Ah! my child—celebrity! it is nothing! If you only knew! I have seen celebrated people here; I would not give one hour of my life to resemble them; exaggerated renown, acquired at the price of fawning; talents of the tenth order; characters vapid or wicked; and others, who had genius, dying of hunger, in a garret or in a damp basement. Nobody spoke of them—until after their death—often not even then. Your father had genius—an incomplete genius; but he had it. And who knew it, except me?"

Aline's hand rested, with a caress, on the old man's arm, who returned at once from the blue country where his soul had followed that of Louis Breton.

"Does that touch you?" said he, with his shrewd smile. "Is it genius that has moved you, or filial love, or pride? You do not know; nor I either, my poor child. The future will tell us."

He rested his refined gaze on that of the young girl, who was softened by it.

"Love your mother dearly, Aline," resumed he, after a pause ; "you do not love her enough."

"Oh !" protested the child, blushing.

"I know what I am saying ! You do not love her enough. Your father had a spark of genius ; your mother has more than that."

Aline's movement was a new protest.

"More than that, my granddaughter. Your mother has the genius of goodness. That is an incarnate devotion. One does not suspect how much devotion and self-abnegation is sometimes required of a woman, in order that her husband should succeed in being clever. Nobody has expended more of it than your mother. You would not even suspect it. And she has been the same for you. She has loved you too much."

Aline's face expressed surprise, mingled with doubt and with some irony. Leroy read clearly the expression of her delicate and mobile features.

"Yes, loved you too much ; and it is for that reason that you do not love her enough. Your mother instinctively hates everything which is a useless show ; every word intended to produce an effect. She acts silently, and devotes herself so quietly that no one would perceive it—not even you. But if you are ever ungrateful, Aline, you will be very culpable. She has only you ; she will never love any one more than you. I know her ; she is a steadfast soul. Try to deserve having had such a mother ; they are not all like her. Do you think I am scolding you ? No—I am only warning you— Stop ! there is the clock ; let us go to breakfast."

As they mounted the little flight of steps that led to the dining-room, Leroy cut a small branch of the

colossal jasmine, which covered all one side of the house.

"Here is the flower preferred by your mother," said he, giving it to the child. "It is small, makes no show, and withers when one touches it. But it has a sweet perfume, it is of an exquisite form, and it resembles a star. It is an emblem of Julianne. Do not forget it."

CHAPTER V.

THE last roses had shed their leaves on the grave of Louis Breton when Julianne decided to install herself in Paris. This change involved so many great griefs and small worries that the poor woman had put it off with every means in her power. But, with the reopening of the schools, some lessons had been found for her, and the imperative feeling of necessity had induced her to accept them.

Into her narrow lodgings, on the fourth floor, composed of two rooms and a small kitchen, she had tried to crowd the greater part of the furniture from her old apartment. In spite of her efforts she had been obliged to sell a part of them—a great heart-break for her; they were not handsome, but each one of them recalled some recollection of their happy youth, and it was those which she no longer had that now seemed to her the most dear.

The great division between the past and the future had thus been accomplished.

Aline was at a boarding-school.

Never had Madame Breton imagined the readiness with which the young girl had accepted this separation, at which her mother's heart bled every moment. She had foreseen resistance and objections without

end ; but Aline had listened to her decision without a frown.

"It doesn't signify to you, then ?" she could not help asking with a secret bitterness.

"It signifies a great deal to me !" the child had answered ; "but, since you say it is necessary, I can only comply with it."

Madame Breton wound her arms around her daughter, and pressed her to her heart, with a keen agony. That was not the way in which *she* would have accepted the announcement of a like separation, she said to herself. Was it possible, then, that her daughter did not love her at all, or at least did not love her as much as she wished ?

"Aline," she murmured, "this breaks my heart !"

The child disengaged herself from her mother's arms ; and in her turn placed an almost protecting hand on Julianne's shoulder. "Mamma," said she, "be reasonable, since it is necessary."

Julianne's heart was more and more oppressed. "Be reasonable !" It was she who should have pronounced that wise word. At this moment, she felt that she would have experienced joy at seeing her daughter swoon with grief in her arms. Had she, then, an insensible soul ? She knew now that she had often feared so, without having acknowledged it to herself.

"I am reasonable," she said, not without a shadow of reserve, quite new in her heart and in her attitude ; "but it is natural that, at the moment of separating myself from you for the first time in my life, I should feel a great sadness ; and I am astonished to see you feel so little of it !"

A flash of pride shone in Aline's eyes. She also suffered ; but the strange ideal which this small child had formed for herself did not permit her to show it. She thought she was "showing character," displaying a stoical firmness, by imposing silence upon the least movement of her soul ; and, in her pride (of a street-Arab), she was tempted to feel some disdain for those who allowed their feelings to appear. Her mother's remark, instead of wounding or softening her, gave her a certain satisfaction. She must have played the part, imposed by herself, very well, since her own mother had been deceived by it. However, at twelve years of age one is not made of marble ; and, after the first impression, she felt her heart strangely softened.

"Let us both be reasonable, mamma," said she. "The boarding-school is not cheerful. But I wish to be courageous, and I will be."

She had spoken in an almost joyous tone, although her heart and her eyes were full of tears. She kissed Julienne, to prevent her from seeing her face, and pretended to laugh, to disguise the emotion in her voice, so well that her mother remained undecided and unsatisfied after this conversation.

When the day arrived, Aline was conducted by Madame Breton, accompanied by Leroy, to the institution of which they told many wonders. She went through the scene of saying good-by very well, which was very much cut short, however, by the wisdom of the old philosopher ; with still more composure, she allowed herself to be presented to her companions, and was able to face the critical examination of all those eyes which were fastened upon her.

It was, however, a very difficult moment, the most difficult of all in her short and almost solitary life. With her exaggerated self-love, with her keenness of perception, Aline was bound to suffer more than another from the least unkindness, from mockery, above all, which plunged her into internal rages. Neither one nor the other was wanting here ; if Christian charity should disappear from this world, it is not in a girls' boarding-school, apparently, that one will find it again. Nothing of it showed on her face. At the evening meal she ate, like the others, the food that was offered her, in spite of the repugnance of her stomach, which was accustomed in the paternal home to simple but excellent dishes. She afterward went to her bed in the dormitory, without showing anything of the real horror with which this promiscuous sleeping inspired her ; that which was most painful was to undress before all these people. She found in this proceeding something gross and indecent, which shocked all her ideas of self-respect and delicacy. She did it, however, and got into bed, straight and rigid, under her thin covering. Her regular breathing soon simulated sleep ; and when the night-inspectress made her round, she noticed the good appearance of the "new-comer," even the abandonment and forgetfulness of herself. But so soon as the little lantern had disappeared, Aline's head was buried under the bedclothes, and she cried out, quite low (if one may say so), to her dead father and her absent mother : "O mamma, mamma, I want to go to you !—Papa, if I must live like this, take me, and let there be an end to it !"

The next morning, she got up, obeyed the rules strictly, and conformed herself to everything that was

exacted of her, and said not a word to anybody. In a week she was very much changed, pale and still more thin ; her eyes had rings around them, but she was reckoned a model scholar—almost too perfect, they said to her mother, when she came to see her ; they would have liked to find more fault with her. Well taught, intelligent, only too proud, and not making herself liked by her companions.

Julienne restrained herself to receive a kiss from her only child, when Aline came into the parlor ; she had a frightful dread of again hearing that terrible "Be reasonable, mamma !" She was, therefore, more than reasonable, and prepared for all emotions.

However, when she saw such a different Aline come in, from the one she had left a week before, she could not restrain a movement of fright.

"Are you ill ?" said she, straining her anxiously against herself.

"No, mamma ; not at all."

"Are you tired ?"

Aline smiled ; that smile was as puzzling as it could be. "You very well understand, mamma," she said, "that I am not greatly amused. But I am not here to amuse myself. I must work, and I do work."

"Don't work too hard," the poor mother could not help saying.

"No, mamma," quietly answered the child.

Their conversation stopped short. What could they say in the midst of the hubbub by which they were surrounded ! There is a knack for the mothers of boarding-school girls, as for everybody else : the mothers who are accustomed to the parlor, have a particular address ; they are at their ease there, and know

how to pitch their voice between high and low, which allows them to give advice to their children. Julianne was very far from possessing this particular knack; she was, on the contrary, as awkward, as embarrassed, in this new situation as her natural distinction would allow her to be. Aline felt it as much as Madame Breton herself.

"I have brought you some little cakes," said the latter, offering her a package.

"Thank you, mamma," answered the little girl. "But, you know, don't bring me any more."

"Why?" said Julianne, with her heart oppressed. Since the death of her husband, her daughter's words often caused in her this doleful impression.

"It costs money; and I can very well do without them. I have need of nothing, I assure you. We are not rich, and I cost you enough already."

Madame Breton had a mind to seize her daughter and carry her far away from the spot where she had heard such a cruel speech. She thought it cruel without knowing precisely in what. Aline's intention was good; but was it not abominable?

"Aline," said she, in a very low voice, "never again say anything like that; or I shall think you wish to give me pain. You do not wish that, I hope?"

She had taken her daughter's hand and pressed it almost to crushing it; she felt that the pressure was returned, and she loosened the fingers. A flood of tears rose simultaneously into the eyes of both of them, and they fell into each other's arms.

The other mothers chattered with their daughters; several talked among themselves, as if at a reception. Julianne suddenly had the odd impression that this

parlor was like a great omnibus. The idea of a sacred emotion like this in an omnibus might be very comical or very repugnant; she hadn't a mind given to the comic, and so, a little disheartened, she got up.

"Are you going?" said Aline, without trying to stop her.

Julienne had not got up to go, but her daughter's question showed her that she had nothing better to do.

"Yes," said she; "I will come again on Sunday. It is a fortnight from now that you go out, is it not?"

"Yes, mamma. Until we meet again, then."

They kissed each other once more. Aline went with her mother to the door of the parlor; certain privileged pupils went as far as the street-door, but Aline had no right to reckon herself among these privileged ones. She saw Julienne disappear at the turning of the corridor, and then returned to her classroom, which was almost deserted at the moment, always holding by the end of her finger the little package of cakes, tied with a rose-colored string.

In passing the school-room for the smaller children, she saw a little girl, of six or seven years, sitting on a bench, with her legs dangling, her eyes red, and a desolate look.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Aline.

"Nobody has come to see me," answered the little one, beginning to cry again.

"Stop; eat that, it is good," said the young girl, giving her the cake.

The child's tears suddenly dried up; she opened the paper with self-possession and greediness, and stared with open eyes.

"Oh! yes, it is good!" said she, quite diverted.

Aline went away without looking behind her. If she had known that her mother came on foot, in a fine autumn rain, in order that she might be able to add two little cream-puffs, she would at once have said to her, "You are not reasonable!" And if Julianne had known that it was a strange child who ate them, what would she have thought? This, however, is where Aline's stoicism carried her; while Madame Breton returned in the omnibus—the real one, this time—with the prospect of a doubtful connection with the next line, at the end of a long journey.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the Saturday before Aline's first outing, Madame Breton, on returning home, found a letter from her godfather. After having read it a first time in haste, she read it a second time very slowly, and remained plunged in thought so profound that she forgot her dinner. The letter ran thus :

"MY DEAR JULIENNE : A demand has been made upon me, which I think I ought to submit to you. Some one wishes a French lady, a widow, of about thirty-five years of age, educated and well brought up, to take charge of the education of two little girls, of nine and eleven years. The terms are magnificent; eight thousand francs a year, a contract for three years, all expenses paid, and, at the end of the time fixed, a gratuity proportioned to the services rendered. It is in Russia, in the country, on the side of Poland. I thought of you at once; and I have promised to give an answer in forty-eight hours. You can come and talk about it with me at breakfast to-morrow. For my part, in your place, I should not hesitate; I would go. Aline's future welfare would be assured. Reflect and decide.

"Your affectionate old godfather,

"LEROY."

Three years of exile in a far-distant country ; Aline alone in France ! Yes ; but also what a result ! A dowry, or at least an independence for Aline.

Always Aline ! Nothing for Juliette ! What did it matter about Juliette, in fact ? If Aline's future welfare could really be assured by this sacrifice, why not make it ?

Madame Breton suddenly felt an irrepressible desire to talk to some one about this project ; too many ideas assailed her at once, she could never unravel them all alone by herself. She had a mind, at first, to go and see her godfather ; but the evening was well advanced, and the wise old man went to bed early. Who, then ? If she did not put a little order into her troubled brain, she would pass the night without sleep, in a fever. Madame Dalibaud ! Under her apparent frivolity, she was a circumspect and prudent woman, in whatever concerned her fortune and her reputation ; she had known how to keep both the one and the other intact, where many women would have been less happy. Juliette looked at her watch, saw that it was not yet nine o'clock. Madame Dalibaud lived in the Rue Lafitte, which was at least a quarter of an hour away. Juliette hastily put on her bonnet and went out.

Roberta was at home. Lying upon a lounge, and wrapped in a sumptuous dressing-gown, she was giving herself the luxury of a little cold ; a pretext for nursing herself, nothing more. The novel she was reading tired her ; she was delighted to see her dear Juliette ; all the more that, for six weeks, she had been reproaching herself for having neglected her.

"How nice you are !" said she, making Juliette sit beside her. "We will have a good cup of tea to-

gether. How is your daughter? She comes out to-morrow? Bring her to me. Come and dine, both of you. I am most anxious to see her again; she is a very interesting child. I say, how do the lessons get along? Have you anything new to tell me? How your eyes sparkle! Something has happened!"

"Yes."

This was the first word that Julienne could put in; but Madame Dalibaud said nothing more, and kept as quiet as a little mouse while her friend read Leroy's letter to her. It was much more amusing than that insufferable novel.

While Julienne talked, expressing her doubts and perplexities, Madame Dalibaud juggled, in the most dexterous way in the world, with a small tea-tray, which had been brought; and when her friend, stopping in her turn, asked her, "What would you do?" she offered a cup of tea to her, sugared to a nicety, and with a suspicion of cream.

"I?" answered the pretty Roberta, offering the biscuit, "I would start at once. I have always had the idea of traveling in Russia; but I have nothing to do there; and Monsieur Dalibaud, when he went to Moscow, did not wish to take me."

"That is not altogether the same thing," judiciously replied Madame Breton.

"You are right," said Madame Dalibaud, suddenly ceasing her little proceedings as mistress of the house. She sat up, put her feet on the floor, arranged the folds of her robe, and became very serious.

"You ask me for real advice?" said she to her friend. "It is no longer the moment for joking, nor for vain words. They offer you twenty-four thousand

francs to live in Russia for three years, besides a gratuity of which the amount is not specified! Let us say, then, twenty-four thousand francs clear; for the generosity of others— In short, your expenses and Aline's schooling paid, it leaves fifteen thousand francs that you can put aside in three years from now. How much do you own?"

"Nothing," candidly answered Julianne; "a couple of hundred francs, at most, to live on until they shall begin paying me for my lessons."

"How much do you get a month for these lessons?"

"A hundred and ten francs," answered Madame Breton, coloring a little.

"Very well! my dear Julianne, honestly and frankly, you have no other course to follow than to accept."

"And Aline? Alone for three years! Do you think of that?"

"Whether you are here or there, so long as she is at boarding-school, the difference will not be very perceptible."

"I see her, here; I make her go out; I keep up my influence—"

Madame Dalibaud looked her friend straight in the face. "Do you believe you have much influence over her?" said she in a grave tone. "Remember, Julianne, that we are speaking seriously; otherwise I would not thus run the risk of giving you pain. Do you believe in your influence?"

"Not much, I confess; but yet, none at all would not be the same thing!"

"And I? and your godfather? Will we not be here to give good advice, good examples even? For

you know, Julienne, I say nearly everything that comes into my head ; but have you ever seen me commit a reprehensible action ? have you ever heard anything about me that was even doubtful ? ”

“ Never,” frankly answered Madame Breton.

“ Very well ! I will make your daughter go out. I will walk with her ; and Monsieur Leroy will do the same. Three years are soon passed ; and at the end of that, there is a little fortune— But just think of it ! it is so unexpected, Julienne ; it is providential ! ”

The kind woman had become animated in talking, and her eloquence was altogether convincing.

“ It is very hard ! ” murmured Madame Breton. “ And if Aline should suffer from it ? ”

“ From grief ? She has plenty of sense. And she has enough to occupy herself with in her studies. ”

Julienne remained thoughtful. The two friends still talked a long time together ; and it was agreed that the next day, after having breakfasted at Nogent, where Leroy lived all the year round, Madame Breton and her daughter should come and dine with Madame Dalibaud, and tell her what had been agreed upon.

Julienne was very much troubled, the next day, on ringing at the door of the school. Aline saw, at a glance, her unusual trouble ; and, so soon as they were in the street, she questioned her mother, who in a few words explained the situation to her.

The child remained silent, and walked on, with her head erect, her nostrils slightly open, like a young horse a little scared.

“ If you do not wish it, Aline,” said Julienne suddenly, “ you have only to say the word, and it shall be ‘ no ’ at once. I have only you, and I live but for you ;

I will do nothing that will grieve you, nor anything that is not of evident advantage to you."

"Do not say no, mamma," answered Aline, slowly; "there is a great deal to consider in this."

Julienne was frightened. She had dreaded—desired would be more correct—a crisis of despair at the thought of this separation; and she found herself confronted with an almost absolute calm.

"Do you want me to go, then?" she said, in a hurt tone.

"No, mamma. But I tell myself that, during these three years, I shall see very little of you; and I ask myself if, for that little, it is prudent to let such an occasion escape."

"And the vacations?" murmured Julienne, in a broken voice. She felt her strength failing so rapidly, under the sway of her grief, that she caught hold of her daughter's arm, who was now almost as tall as herself.

"Yes, that is true—the vacations. But Madame Dalibaud will make me go out a little. And then, even if I have to remain at the school during the vacations—with that exception—"

There was a certain bitterness in the child's tone, and her mother perceived it.

"I will stay," she said, suddenly regaining her failing energy.

"I think that would not be reasonable," said Aline, with her little wise air. Madame Breton's strength left her altogether, and she staggered. Aline supported her with an arm already strong, and looking at her with a compassionate tenderness. "Cheer up, my poor little mother!" she said, helping her to become firm.

As if under the blow of a whip, Julienne suddenly recovered herself and resumed her walk with a lively step.

The railway station was near; and during the trip they did not exchange a word.

Monsieur Leroy's advice was the same as that of Madame Dalibaud: Julienne ought not to hesitate to accept.

"What do you think of it?" he asked Aline.

She raised to him her eyes, which had become very profound, and said, "I agree with you, grandfather."

Leroy's look turned upon the mother. He was frightened at the intensity of suffering which he read in her. "You are, then, all sworn to my unhappiness?" said those eyes, swimming with despair. He had pity on her.

"My little child," he said, resuming the tender and familiar appellation of her youth, already so far away, "if the sacrifice is above your strength, it is not necessary to attempt it; but if it is only a painful resolution to take, you must have courage. Some people would say to you, 'Reflect!' For my part, when I am to have a tooth pulled, I don't reflect, I go at once to the dentist. I must have the answer by to-morrow noon, Julienne. You have yet to-day and to-night to think of it. Send me a telegram to-morrow morning, 'I go,' or 'I do not go.' I will take charge of all the rest."

He tried in vain to distract Julienne's attention, by talking of other things; she was in a state of mind analogous to that of one condemned to death, and could only think of her sentence. The mother and

daughter left him, without the question being advanced a single step.

Alone, in the cars, in the street, they exchanged only common place words. Aline felt that her mother was vexed with her for not having shown more sadness, and she was vexed with her mother for not having understood what the apparent facility of her resignation had cost her at the bottom of her soul. Almost soured by this double and mute misunderstanding, they arrived at Madame Dalibaud's, freezing and shivering, under a fine autumn rain, which struck through their clothes and soaked their crape.

The parlor was warm and felt good, but not too good, like the mistress of the house herself. A fine wood-fire blazed in the chimney; two lamps gave out a uniform and soft light; the carpet, the mirrors, the gilding, had a look of smiling connection; one felt well at once in this lovely spot, to which an artist would have objected only that it was somewhat commonplace.

Aline and Julianne soon felt their nerves relax there. Madame Dalibaud had not yet returned from the concert at the conservatoire, to which she was a faithful subscriber; but the tea-table, all prepared, was placed under Julianne's care by the housemaid, a grave and experienced matron, who smiled readily, with an air almost as engaging as that of her mistress.

The aroma of the delicate beverage and the warmth softened the disposition of both mother and daughter. Madame Dalibaud did not keep them waiting: wrapped in furs, fresh and pretty, she excused herself for her delay, took off her wraps and installed herself in the chimney corner. The impression diffused itself at once,

in the parlor, that she had not been absent at all; this caused so great a comfort that Aline, meeting her glance, smiled at her spontaneously in response.

Madame Dalibaud checked an involuntary exclamation. In that smile, in that exchange of looks, there revealed itself a personality so clear, so refined, so distinguished, that the pretty woman, who was a *dilettante*, was astonished at it.

"Get up and walk," she said to the child.

Aline obeyed, not without smiling; a slight blush accompanied her movement, which was elegant, although a little stiff, from her fear to displease.

"Very well; sit down now," said Roberta, laughing.—"Come, Julianne; can we talk before this big girl? Yes; I think so. Well! what have you decided?"

Julianne, unnerved by a night without sleep, by this cruel day's work, by a thousand confused and indescribable emotions, answered, almost brutally, "I refuse."

Aline made a sharp movement; then remained stock-still and very pale.

"Why?" asked Madame Dalibaud, without being excited.

Some reason must be given; but Julianne was incapable of giving one which would come near the truth; she answered, at random, "I have not the courage to abandon my child to the dangers of a boarding-school education."

A great silence reigned in the parlor; Aline did not stir. It was the ruin of all her hopes. In her imagination, as an ignorant child, she had caught a glimpse of Pactolus. This small fortune, which her

mother would bring back from exile, appeared to her colossal; it was a starting-point, a springing-board. They would no longer be poor women without resources; they would have "money"; and, as Leroy had said, on her return from Russia, Madame Breton, borne up by this state of affairs, would not be bothered with trying anything else, neither lessons to outside children nor a family school. All these prospects crumbled away, and the dream disappeared in the dust.

Madame Dalibaud gazed at Aline, and thought her absolutely beautiful; her regular features, refined by emotion, had taken on the grandeur of a tragic mask. And what deportment! Not a gesture, not a cry; the perfection of good-breeding! An idea, confused for a moment, formulated itself in her brain, and with her usual promptness she spoke. "Give your daughter to me," she said to Julianne, with her sweet voice.

Madame Breton looked at her with stupor. Aline became quite red, but did not move.

"Give her to me," repeated Roberta. "I have always regretted not having a child, and she will take the place of one to me. In order that I may not have the appearance of bestowing a charity upon you, you shall send me the price you pay at the boarding-school; that will serve to pay her masters. I will take charge of the rest. She shall go to her lessons with the maid; and you will find her, three years hence, such as you wish her to be. Is it agreed?"

Julianne remained mute, stunned, without defense, feeling that, this time, she could no longer resist. She looked at her daughter, whose eyes were fastened upon her. "Do you wish it?" she said simply.

"Yes," answered Aline, motionless.

"Then, it is agreed. We will send a dispatch to Monsieur Leroy," said Madame Dalibaud, going to her blotting-case.

Aline went to her mother and embraced her, long and gravely, which Julianne, crushed, allowed her to do; then she went to Madame Dalibaud and offered her forehead to be kissed, saying, "Thank you, madame."

"She is charming," thought the lovely woman; "I have done extremely well."

A week after, Madame Breton left for Russia.

CHAPTER VII.

THE snow of Christmas was piling itself up in sleet against the double windows; Julianne Breton heard this slight sound, new to her ears, while writing a letter.

Her chamber was high and large; in a corner, her bed was concealed behind a screen, several times folded on itself; opposite, an enormous stove of earthenware, glazed white, and reaching almost to the ceiling, gave out a soft warmth from a wood-fire, lighted in the morning and afterward banked, in a way to give the greatest amount of heat possible. A round table, a bureau, a sofa, arm-chairs, and plain chairs, composed a comfortable furnishing, completed by a dressing-room on one side. And in the profound silence of a night of snow, in the country, far from roads, far from the village, far from everything human and civilized, while over yonder, to the west, the bells were ringing for midnight mass, Julianne was writing to Madame Dalibaud:

“My two little pupils, Olinka and Lioudmila, are asleep in the next room, under the care of a Russian nurse, who has never left them since their birth; and I am thinking of you, in your house, which shelters my only treasure, my Aline.

“Without the anxiety, always present, of this cruel

absence, I should be happy here. Monsieur and Madame Lébédéf are well-bred and good people, who understand my sadness and try to soften it ; their little girls are pretty and gentle, intelligent enough not to make my task too difficult, ignorant and lazy enough not to make it too easy. The material life is generous, very generous ; too much so even ! And with all that, my dear Roberta, I suffer horribly.

“What is Aline doing ? what is she thinking ? Does she think of me ? Does she regret me a little ? I would not wish to know that she is sad, nor even melancholy ; but, if I should hear that she is quite careless and gay, I should be sorry. My life is easy, did I say ?—yes, but it is a life of exile, after all ; nothing can prevent that. I am away from home in every way ; and, even if I were in the midst of a town, this language which I do not understand, these new manners, the strange costumes of the people—all that would leave me very far away, much farther than you can imagine, and make me feel all the distance which separates me from your house. I know what you will say to me ; but do not say it, it is useless. I know all that I ought to repeat to myself ; but if you have any affection for me, my dear Roberta, write to me often, and tell me what is passing through my daughter’s heart.”

The question put by Madame Breton was not easy to unriddle, and Madame Dalibaud was hardly cut out for such a task. To read the heart of another is always difficult enough ; but when it is a question of the heart of a little girl, of twelve and a half years, who knows nothing about herself, who takes all her wishes for realities, her enthusiasms for friendships, and

her dislike for enmities, the task is still more arduous.

Aline had established for herself, from the first day, a very correct footing in Madame Dalibaud's house. Without superciliousness, as also without weakness, she had resolutely refused all assistance from the servants. Her chamber was so well kept by her that the housemaid found nothing to do there, except to sweep the carpet.

"I don't know how Mademoiselle Aline manages," said Mariette, "but everything about her looks as if it had come out of a bandbox—it is so clean and nice."

"Her mother has brought her up well," answered Madame Dalibaud, with the satisfied smile of a pretty woman.

Julienne had, indeed, brought up her daughter well ; and Aline now reaped the fruits of this decent and cautious education, which had prepared her for all the chances, either of fortune or misfortune. The tact, brought by the young girl into her delicate situation, was one of the almost insensible results of this education, which had not proceeded by great epochs, but which, day by day, had instilled into this young soul a respect for others and for herself.

"Aline gives proofs of a perfect tact," answered Madame Dalibaud. "She is neither gay nor sad nor melancholy. She is not what one would call serviceable ; and yet she is always ready to render a service, if nobody is there to do it. She answers when one questions her, and is silent when one pays no attention to her ; in short, she is a charming child. I could sometimes wish for a little more confidence from her ; but

she has known me only for a short time, and I hope that will come later. Her professors are satisfied with her."

Madame Breton read and re-read this letter twenty times. It reassured her on many points, and left her with all her perplexities relative to the principal object of her preoccupation. What was Aline thinking? Madame Dalibaud knew no more about it than herself, apparently. Would Julianne, then, be always ignorant of what was passing at the bottom of her daughter's heart?

Aline's letters did not give her any more information on this subject. They were very good letters, of a pretty handwriting—long, as was the fashion; their orthography was good, the style correct; the little girl gave an account of her studies, of the state of her health; of Monsieur Leroy's visits, who saw her often; she readily described a walk, or some incident of her life, just now very lively; but these long letters left her mother ignorant of the state of her mind.

In despair, Julianne addressed herself to her godfather, adjuring him to tell her what he thought of Aline.

The letter arrived soon, the old fan-maker considering that promptness doubled the value of everything.

"What I think of Aline?" said he; "I know absolutely nothing about it. She is very nice, and even friendly, with me, to whom she has certainly a great desire to be pleasant. If she is happy or unhappy in being where she is, it is impossible for me to tell you. It is a little closed soul; and I have not the least idea what will be discovered in it, later, by whomsoever shall have the key to it! It is already a great thing that Aline should have this outside carriage; if she were

pushed to that extremity, this bearing would, at need, take the place with her of all the virtues. Do not be scandalized, my little girl. I am sure that Aline is full of hidden qualities ; I mean only that the world, which is superficial enough generally, would readily hold her free from the rest, provided she shows it the qualities it prefers, and those your daughter has. When you decided to confide her to Madame Dalibaud, you did not ask my advice. In spite of all that militates in favor of your charming friend, my answer would have been against it. The boarding-school, with all its drawbacks, was preferable, in view of the uncertain future of Aline. Your resolution once taken, I did not judge it proper to interfere ; and it was well for me, for your daughter seems to have accepted only the right side of her sojourn with Madame Dalibaud ; and the luxury which surrounds her does not appear to have inspired in her any particular defects. In view of the remarkable wisdom of that little head, I hope that nothing disagreeable will follow later. If I see anything anomalous, I will let you know."

When Julienne had finished reading this letter, she folded it up and heaved a sigh.

"You have news of your daughter ?" asked Madame Lébédéf, who followed her movements with interest from the lounge, where a pitiless malady fastened her.

"Yes, madame," answered Julienne, without raising her eyes.

"Good news, I hope ?" insisted the excellent woman, whose life was but one long and painful trial.

"Very good, thank you," replied Madame Breton.

The sadness of her voice had struck Madame Lé-

bédef, who meditated an instant, and then, with some hesitation, spoke to her as a friend.

"My husband and I," she said, "have often remarked your melancholy when you receive letters from Paris; we are very much attached to our children, and we understand that you must be so to yours. If it can give you any pleasure, we would not know how to get along without you here, you must see it only too well yourself; but next summer, during the vacation, you might have Mademoiselle Aline come here for several weeks—the expense of the journey will be our affair, of course; we would like to see you happy; at least happier," added Madame Lébédéf, casting a look at Julienne's black dress, from which the latter had taken off the crape, so as not to sadden the view of those on whom she was dependent in the future.

Madame Breton was infinitely touched by this unexpected offer, the generosity of which could not fail to strike her. Without hesitation, but with a profound emotion, she refused it.

"Why?" insisted the invalid, with sincere regret in her voice.

"Because this journey, with all the new and extraordinary things she would see, would trouble my daughter in her studies, and would certainly delay the time when she will have finished them. And then, also, madame," added she, "because one ought not to take advantage— I thank you for having proposed it to me; and I am as grateful to you for it as if the thing had been done."

"I am sorry for it," said Madame Lébédéf, with the sad smile of a doomed woman.

Her benevolent soul discovered a palliative for the

rigor which Julianne employed toward herself, by telling her two daughters to talk about Aline often to her mother. The silence which Julianne had preserved, through discretion, was broken by the childish tattle of the little ones ; who, happy at being authorized to do so, made her tell, little by little, everything that concerned this absent friend—the details of Aline's childhood called up a hundred times, and a hundred times repeated by the mother, who found in these recollections a refreshment and delicious peace.

Aline when small was quite another Aline. Like all children, she had stretched out her powerless little hands to her mother ; she had claimed her protecting aid, and had told her little miseries. It had formerly been quite a different Aline, who came crying, with bleeding hands, to show Julianne the traces of her pranks ; an Aline who obstinately demanded some coveted object, and consoled herself for not getting it, with the tender words and kisses of her mother, cheek against cheek, as little children are always consoled. This Aline was the adored, the joy, of the past. Ah ! how far away it all was, that happy time when she had told everything, explained everything, in her incomplete language, which Julianne understood so well ! And now so far away ; the actual Aline, with her profound eyes and her enigmatic smile, being no longer there to tarnish the flower of these recollections, Madame Breton had the illusion that her daughter remained the same as formerly, that her maternal heart-aches were only a bad dream, and that Aline, living in France, stretched out her hands toward her, jealous of caresses. It was only an illusion, and it did not last very long ; but it gave to Julianne a renewal of hap-

piness, which rendered her younger and more animated than her new friends had yet seen her.

The little girls were the first to experience the benefit of this change. Madame Breton, until now, had fulfilled her duties in the most conscientious manner ; but that something, from which is formed an intimacy between pupil and teacher, and without which there is no real influence ; that bond of love (as one might say, renewing an old expression) did not exist. From the day when the little girls found themselves no longer strangers to the idea of Aline, when Julienne could include them, with a smile, in the same thought, confidence existed on the part of the children, and affection on that of the teacher. The maternal instinct, awakened in all mothers by all children, whoever they may be, confined hitherto to solicitude, raised itself to the heights of tenderness.

They were indeed worthy of interest, these delicate children ; born of a doomed mother, healthy, but always with the frail limit of a, perhaps, hereditary malady ; not precisely pretty, but refined, elegant, with their mouths too large, and their eyes too light ; good and sweet, a little spoiled, capable of little caprices soon abandoned, of little angers soon calmed ; loving dearly their father, who was often absent, from the urgency of his business ; adoring their fragile mother, whose precarious state they divined without understanding it.

Everybody must have loved them. Julienne's heart, at the end of several days, was full of pity for them ; and, after several months, of a real tenderness. When the Russians take the trouble to have delicacy, they will show it to everybody ; Olinka and Lioudmila, brought up in the most refined school of feeling, had

in themselves all their mother's charm, with the special grace of well-beloved children, and above all of happy young girls, who appreciated their own happiness.

Lioudmila, the youngest and most petted, learned to put her head on Julianne's knees, as she did with her mother, on the days when the latter, too unwell to remain quite calm, had to deny herself the caresses of her children. Olinka, a little older, saw her do this with an intelligent smile, as if she excused this little weakness of "baby's"; but the way in which she pressed her teacher's hand, at the morning and evening "shake hands," testified to a strong affection.

As time went on Julianne feared lest she had excited, without wishing it, the poor mother's jealousy. Before the end of the first year it happened that she, more than once, caught the eyes of Madame Lébédéf fixed upon the group which she formed with the children, while she explained to them some small work within their capacity, or taught them some French game. They were very pale brown eyes, speckled with gilded spots, too large in such an emaciated face. They had shed many tears—these eyes, formerly very fine, but now encircled with large somber rings; was it on account of others, or for themselves? Madame Lébédéf would have been happy, however, if she had not counted, one by one, the days of her short life; her husband, although often absent, was sincerely attached to her, and treated her with sincere affection, the manifestations of which were sometimes touching. When he came into the parlor, which she always occupied, he approached the lounge with a pleasant smile, and carried his wife's transparent hand to his lips, with a tender respect which always caused a certain

emotion in Julianne, so much did she feel her painful fears.

Monsieur Lébédéf was a man of scarcely forty years, large, hardy, well-bred, with that particular elegance which is acquired by several years' service in the Imperial Guards. He had left the regiment in order to take charge of an important factory of porcelain which he had inherited. Without special acquirements, but very intelligent, he had taken the direction of this little world, as he would have accepted no matter what function ; and things had not gone much worse than under his predecessor. They went even better ; and, at the end of the first year, he brought to his wife, with a certain pride, the brilliant result of his management.

The factory was situated at about thirty versts from the property where they lived, which was quite a favorable circumstance for the repose of Madame Lébédéf, whose delicate nerves would have suffered from the immediate neighborhood of a population of workmen ; but her husband was on the go about half the time, which took away nothing from his good humor.

Monsieur Lébédéf had at first considered Julianne as a necessary evil ; he had not, at the outset, accepted the presence of a stranger at his fireside. A Russian teacher would have suited him better, but his wife had insisted ; and, besides, Russian or French, the restraint, resulting from this new face, would be almost the same.

He had applied to his French color-merchant, who in his turn had begged Monsieur Leroy to look out for a widow lady, fulfilling the wished-for conditions. "Not a single woman," he had specified ; "they have

but one idea, that of getting married ; with widows, there is at least one chance in two that they are disgusted with marriage."

Julienne's tranquillity had calmed the nervous apprehension which he had felt at the beginning ; and, seeing his little daughters becoming attached to her, he said to himself that, in addition to her excellent recommendations, this Frenchwoman must be good. Meantime, more than six months had passed by before he had, properly speaking, looked at her ; and this event was due to a crisis in Madame Lébédéf. The poor woman had fainted away ; and, instead of losing precious time in calling assistance, Madame Breton seized the little country medicine-chest, which was permanently on a round table, and administered the remedies usual in such cases.

Monsieur Lébédéf came in just in time to receive the first reanimated glance from his wife's eyes. A little astonished at not finding there the maid who took care of her ordinarily, he cast his eyes on Madame Breton, and kept them there.

What struck him was the look of profound pity in her countenance, joined to a calmness, a self-possession, of which he thought he had the monopoly. Pity alone would not have drawn his attention to the same degree. He noticed then the regularity of features in this face, which he had looked upon as insignificant ; the beauty of the abundant and brilliant hair, modestly knotted on her head ; the luster of her teeth, which were exposed by a smile of encouragement to the invalid. All this was a revelation to him.

"You are very good, Madame Breton," said he, with a politeness less trite than usual.

Madame L  b  def, who had understood, thanked her husband with a look, and Julianne retired at once.

"She is decidedly good-looking, that woman!" said Monsieur L  b  def, when his wife was in a condition to bear the conversation. "She is a real god-send."

"My friend," answered Madame L  b  def, putting her wasted hand on that of her husband, who was seated beside her, "she is a treasure. If I die—yes, if I die, and that will be soon—it is necessary at any cost that she remain with the children."

"Do not talk of that, I beg of you," began he.

She insisted on continuing. "At any cost, my dear husband; in the interests of the little ones, it must be."

"The question of cost is no great matter," murmured Monsieur L  b  def.

"With her, unfortunately, it will not be a question of money. She loves her daughter, she loves only her daughter; we must arrange it so that the desire to go and meet her again shall not be stronger than everything else."

"Let her have the child come here! It is all one to us! Why not at once?"

It was after this conversation that Madame L  b  def had made the proposal to Julianne, which the latter had not accepted.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAYS and months passed away. Two years had rolled by since Madame Breton's departure for Russia; and, far from accustoming herself to living far away from Aline, the poor mother only suffered the more. At certain moments her suffering became so intolerable that she had a mind to fly, on foot, through the snow, to rejoin her sole object in life.

This insane desire beset her so strongly that she could not keep silent about it with her old friend Leroy. "Some day I shall do the deed," she wrote to him; "I know that it would be cowardly, miserable, and ungrateful; I know that these people have for me a goodness which passes imagination; last Christmas, Madame Lébédéf sent me, in a pocket-book, an envelope which contained a thousand rubles, with the words, 'For Aline.' But I am no longer mistress of myself: the prospect of passing still another year here renders me desperate; others would say, 'Only a year!' but I say, 'Yet another year!' I can never bear this another year. I am homesick for all of you; but when I think of Aline, I have a fever and lose my sleep. If you do not wish me to fail in my engagement and to commit a base action, find something to say to me which shall be stronger than my feelings, for in myself I see no hope."

When he received this letter, Monsieur Leroy was thinking precisely as his goddaughter did. The day before he had seen Aline at Madame Dalibaud's; and while he could testify to the excellent agreement which existed between her and her protectress, he had been frightened at the ease with which the little girl moved in all this luxury.

In the young girl, almost a woman, whom he had before his eyes, nothing remained of the child of former times. The little awkwardness, so natural at that age, had disappeared under a force of will that never failed. Aline had even learned not to have a timid look, although she was so to a degree that one would not imagine; her mother and Leroy alone would have been able to recognize her emotion by the slight pallor which surrounded her mouth when she had to conquer an excess of timidity, which her immense pride could not save her from; but those who only saw her casually were astonished at her perfect ease.

Everything, in the mean time, was difficult for her in this house which she had entered without hesitation. From the beginning she had felt wounded in her self-esteem by the questions asked about her: "A relation? A goddaughter? A *protégée*, then?" This word *protégée* was full of implied meaning, which was humiliating.

Madame Dalibaud had given proof, under these circumstances, of a perfect tact: "She is the daughter of a friend. Her mother is making a prodigious amount of money in Russia; and, instead of letting her wither in a boarding-school, she has consented to leave her with me; this has given me a companion; and even, in seeing her progress in her studies with so

much success, I sometimes imagine that I am becoming educated myself ! " All this with a jolly, worldly laugh, with which one takes away half the value of things said, in such a way that they become light, trifling, like the flakes from the flower of the poplar-tree, which in June are blown about by the winds up into the blue sky.

At the end of the first winter, Aline's position no longer provoked offensive questions; in Madame Dalibaud's circle, with the extraordinary absurdity that characterizes certain sets, they called her the little Russian ; and " the little Russian " she remained.

During the summer, a sojourn at Dieppe—Aline's dresses had passed from black to white ; then the little black-and-white check succeeded ; and at last, with the return of the winter season, a colored costume was assumed by the little girl, who thereafter accompanied her friend almost everywhere.

Madame Dalibaud really loved her very much ; Aline's silent tact took away from her presence every feeling of restraint ; she appeared and disappeared in the parlor with an astonishing propriety. If she were left at home, she did not take it in dudgeon ; on the other hand, she always showed herself ready to be taken out. The amiable woman could not recover from her astonishment.

Aline was working out her apprenticeship to the world. From the conversations carried on before her, she had soon learned that which renders a woman agreeable or otherwise, and her aim in life was never to show herself unpleasant. In her interior tribunal, she passed some unexpected judgments on these people—sometimes just, often false—but always based upon

words which she had heard them say, and which she had well or ill understood. She had conceived a silent but profound horror for two ladies, because they had spoken with contempt of the situation of a teacher. "Another kind of service," had said one of them. "I would rather be a housemaid," had said the other. Aline had set herself to despise these persons who disdained her mother's profession ; but, with a very natural lack of logic, she resolved never to be a teacher herself.

From this moment Madame Dalibaud was quite astonished to see her devote herself with an ardent zeal to drawing, which she had neglected hitherto. Aline even wrote to her mother to ask that she might follow a course of lessons in some fashionable studio. Julianne was a little touched by it. The conversation which she had formerly had with Monsieur Leroy was, indeed, the summary of her old ideas ; and since then she was more and more confirmed in the idea of preparing Aline for a career of instruction. At first, she gave her daughter a vague answer ; but a second and more urgent letter proved to her that Aline would not be content with mere non-acceptance of her purposes.

She then wrote to Leroy and to Madame Dalibaud, asking their advice, which was diametrically opposed.

"Let her do it, if it amuses her," said she.

"Allow nothing to distract her from her examinations," said he.

She wrote to her daughter that it would have to be later. Aline's answer inflicted upon her a very violent emotion. "You put me off to the Greek calends, my dear mamma," wrote the young girl ; "have you, then, forgotten that my father wished to make an artist of

me? You desired that I should have my diplomas, and I have them; but that is no reason why I should allow the gifts, which I inherit from my lamented father, to perish. If he were living, I am very sure that he would encourage me with all his strength in a path where, with the aptness which he has left me as a heritage, I hope to gain honor and profit."

What a letter from the pen of a young girl of fourteen! Anybody but Julianne would have been offended by it. The widow was moved by it to the bottom of her heart.

Had she, indeed, followed her own counsel—neglected to give, to the influence of the absent father, the legitimate part to which, although dead, he had a right? The soul of the poor woman, tender to scrupulousness, received from this a cruel blow. Moreover, the tone of this letter, even though it ended with affectionate words, was not that of tenderness. "Must I lose my daughter's heart?" asked the unhappy woman of herself; and, without being willing to wait for time to decide, she sent at once the permission asked.

From this moment she was devoured by a thirst to see Aline once more; the desperate letter written by her to Monsieur Leroy but feebly expressed her intolerable suffering. The answer from her old friend dismayed her, but replaced her in the straight path of abnegation, which was her true *rôle* in life.

"You wish to return to France by breaking your engagements, and you ask of me an argument strong enough to restrain you? But, my dear Julianne, you have given your word for three years; and a promise is sacred. If you return, what will your daughter think of you?"

There was nothing to reply. Julianne bowed her head and resumed her duty, bruised but submissive.

And, besides, events were now occurring that took from her the possibility of thinking of herself.

For some months the health of Madame Lébédéf had been going into a decline. In spite of the appearance of improvement, which followed her crises, and which proceeded from the struggle of her good constitution against the consumption that wasted her away, the poor young woman was visibly descending the route that leads to eternal repose. More than once, on coming out of these crises, when she had regained her clearness of mind, which had been darkened by intolerable tortures, Madame Lébédéf had talked of the future with Julianne. She faced her end not without regrets, but without weakness; her only anxiety was about leaving her children without moral guidance. She had neither mother nor sister, who could take charge of continuing her work; her friends had become indifferent, from the mere fact of her remoteness. Their father would still remain to the orphans; but can a man suffice to form the characters of young girls? A resource offered itself—an Imperial Institute, where the little girls would receive the education due to their rank and fortune; but that would have torn these delicate little flowers from their native earth, and their fragile health seemed always threatened.

"Madame Breton," said the dying woman one day, "you must promise me that you will not leave my children after my death."

Julianne, frightened, stared, but answered nothing.

"You must promise me," repeated the young woman. "Their father adores them; but he is only a man;

and when I shall no longer be here— He will do—we will do everything you wish ; but swear to me that you will not abandon my little children !”

“Madame,” said Julianne, “you know that I love your children; but I also am a mother.”

“It is for that reason that you understand me. Let your daughter come here ; she will share the education of my children ; we will give you a fortune. My husband will settle a pension on you ; but you will not leave my daughters until they are sixteen. You must promise me, if you do not wish me to die unhappy, and angry with you.”

She looked at Julianne with eyes full of eager supplication. The excitement, which had sustained her, suddenly fell ; and, hiding her face in her hands, she began to cry.

“I beg of you,” cried Madame Breton, “do not cry ! You will make yourself ill !”

A violent access of coughing confirmed her foresight. When Madame Lébédéf had become calm, she was too feeble to pronounce even a word. She contented herself with pressing Julianne’s hand in a significant manner.

Similar scenes were renewed more than once, leaving Aline’s mother more cruelly torn at each repetition. She was much attached to her little pupils. The resigned sweetness with which Madame Lébédéf faced death seemed to her almost superhuman, and inspired her with an affection, mingled with respect, which touched her to the bottom of her soul. On the other hand, to give up returning to Aline ; to sacrifice not only her own joy, but perhaps the happiness and future welfare of her child, was an abnegation beyond

her strength. She could not constrain herself to give a promise which she was sure of not being able to fulfill.

Monsieur Lébédéf at last found a combination of a nature to conciliate all interests. He proposed to Julianne to take a month's vacation at once—they were then at the end of May—and to sign a new agreement of three years from the expiration of the first period ; with the condition that Madame Breton might let her daughter come back, and bring her up near herself, together with her little pupils. In their desire to secure Julianne, Monsieur and Madame Lébédéf, with true Russian improvidence, had not cared to take into consideration the inconvenience which might result from the presence of a young girl, of whom they knew nothing ; she was the daughter of her whom they were pleased to regard as their best friend, and that was enough for them to accord to her, at the outset, a presumption of all the virtues. Moreover, the salary of the teacher was increased by a third ; and the gratuity promised was raised, at the expiration of the six years, to the sum of twenty-five thousand francs, guaranteed by a bank in Moscow.

This time Julianne found herself caught. What could she object to such generosity, to an assurance of so fine a future ? What influenced her most strongly was not, it must be said, the question of pecuniary advantage, either future or present ; it was the immediate possibility of seeing her daughter. Although the time to pass with her was very short, since it took not less than four days' travel to return to Monsieur Lébédéf's domain, yet the idea that she could embrace her daughter, without waiting any longer, put fire into the

poor mother's heart. She would have signed anything they might have wished, in order to leave the same day. Her departure was not delayed by any want of readiness.

"Mon Dieu! but you are happy!" said Madame Lébédéf, seeing her go and come with a rejuvenated look. The little children were frankly jealous of the young French girl, who was depriving them of their "little madame," and did not hesitate to say so, with a pouting but playful air which won for them, every moment, fresh caresses from the delighted Julianne. At last the hour of departure arrived. Monsieur Lébédéf took Madame Breton in his carriage to Viazma, where there was a railway station. He had been able in three days, thanks to his influence, to obtain the necessary papers for this journey.

At the moment when he was leaving Madame Breton on the platform of the station, the good man took the teacher's hand. "Remember," said he, "that my wife could not die tranquil if you were not there. She has unlimited confidence in you, which I share. But if you allow yourself to be detained, or if misfortune will have it that God calls her to him in your absence, do not forget that she will die with an uneasy and troubled spirit."

"If Madame Lébédéf feels herself near her end, send me a telegram, monsieur," said Julianne, her eyes full of tears, "and I will come, whatever it may cost me."

Monsieur Lébédéf made Julianne's fingers crack in pressing her hand, and turned away his eyes. The train was coming, visible from a great distance, with the big smoke-stack of the locomotive burning wood;

they did not exchange another word ; at the last moment, a mere look sufficed, and that look was, on the part of Julianne, a sacred promise. How tedious they are, these halting-places which lead to happiness ! Town after town, station after station, some of them high and cold in their casing of brick, others gay and smiling under an attire of climbing vines ; they all defiled under Julianne's indifferent eyes, until the moment when, the train whistling at the passage of Saint-Denis, she felt such an agitation that she could not contain herself. Alone in her compartment since leaving Tergnier, she went from one window to the other, surfeiting her eyes with the commonplace spectacle of this ugly suburb, almost choked with the beating of her heart, and only able to repeat, "Aline, Aline !"

The train stopped at last before the platform. With her little bag in her hand, Julianne remained on the sill of the car, afraid to descend. She had not had time to receive an answer. If her letter had not arrived ? If she would be obliged to run all the way to Madame Dalibaud's, and perhaps to wait until Aline returned from her lessons ? If some misfortune had occurred ?

She did not dare to move. A train-hand, seeing her quite pale, offered her his hand to help her down. She regained her senses at once, passed under an archway, and face to face with her, against the wooden railing which prevents the approach to the platform, she perceived the pretty face of Madame Dalibaud.

And Aline ? Was that Aline ; that great girl, who was a head taller than she ? The eyes of the mother and daughter met ; Julianne felt her limbs tremble

under her ; yes, it was her child, her only thought, it was Aline !

In another second she had her in her arms, astonished, almost stupefied, by the contact with these members which she did not know, with this supple form, already rounded, which was no longer that of the child of former times. Could this be her daughter, this young person, so different from her little girl ? Julianne realized all at once the length of her absence, which she had measured hitherto for herself only ; and the tears which flowed from her eyes were not, as she had hoped, only tears of joy ; there were, among these, tears caused by the feeling of time lost, irreparable for her love.

The hours which followed were none the less delicious ; seated in Madame Dalibaud's parlor, Aline's hand in hers, Julianne, recovered from her surprise, no longer felt anything but joy at seeing her daughter so tall, so pretty, so worthy of attention ; the regret at having missed the development of all these advantages was weakened by the pleasure of enjoying it as a discovery.

Monsieur Leroy came in the afternoon ; he had not changed in any way ; always the same forest of thick white hair on his characteristic head ; his carefully shaved face had not a wrinkle ; his blue eyes were as keen and his perception of things as clear as ever. After a short visit he left.

"You know where I live," he said to his god-daughter ; "when you have a mind, you will come and see me. We have some business matters to talk over, as you have intrusted me with the care of investing your savings ; I am at your service."

The astonishing calm of this excellent man acted upon Julianne, until now still agitated. In finding him so like himself, she understood that half of her agitation, at least, had no basis, and that Aline had merely become different from the child of former times, which helped her to resume her normal condition.

Madame Breton yearned to talk with her daughter, to study her, to compare her with herself; but this was not easy. From the first moment, when the questions and answers were crossing each other, Aline had set herself to questioning her mother about that different world in which she lived; and in such cases, the one who questions has the advantage. The interest which she showed in the interior and exterior life of her mother was, besides, so natural that the latter answered with joy; but this took up all the time of their conversation. After having answered two or three of the first questions, the young girl gradually took the direction of the talk; so completely, that Julianne, while giving herself up without reserve, had as yet learned but little about Aline.

Her first deceit arose from an artistic cause. When they were settled down into a kind of normal life, Julianne, who had accepted her friend's hospitality, asked to see Aline's drawings; the latter brought to her, with an air of modest triumph, the portfolio containing her studies at the studio. It was a cruel blow for Madame Breton; in contact with her husband, she had acquired the "scent" peculiar to women and to artists' friends; incapable of holding a pencil herself, she knew very well how to recognize the merits or the defects of a work of art. She could not say in what Aline's drawings were deficient, but she felt at the first

glance that, with a certain manual dexterity, which might deceive the ignorant, Aline did not possess any of the qualities of high art ; she neither knew how to see, nor to portray what she did see ; and her little studies, although taken from nature, were purely a "knack."

"Well," said Aline, who had looked only at her drawings, "what do you say to them ? Was I wrong to wish to go into a studio ?"

"There is merit in them," said Madame Breton, slowly ; "but you are still very far from the reality."

Aline colored, which was with her an indication of great irritation.

"Then you do not think this good ?" she said, in her short tone.

"There are some good things in it, but it is not concise ; you should look at your model more attentively."

Aline's first impulse was to take her portfolio and withdraw it from such unfriendly eyes ; but, thanks to the control which she had over herself, she contented herself with placing another drawing before her mother.

"This is better," said Julianne, much touched ; for she had followed the phases of this little interior struggle.

"Come, what fault do you find with my drawings ?" said Aline, abruptly ; "at the studio, they think them very pretty."

"Certainly, they are very pretty ; but they are not sufficiently delineated."

"Ah, yes ; the drawing, the line—that was good formerly ; now we proceed by masses."

"Still, one must make these masses resemble the model!" said Julianne, out of patience. "Here is a head; I know this plaster-cast; I had it before me for two years, while I gave my lessons. Well, the model has a longer nose, eyes closer together, the mouth larger; it is not so pretty, but it is finer. Your head is not that of a Héb  , it is a Parisian."

"And it is the Parisians whom I shall paint!" replied Aline, with temper. "One has no need to study the antique in order to make portraits of women of the world. Bless me!"

From another portfolio she made fly about the room a cloud of rough pen-sketches, caricatures for the most part, as badly drawn as the rest, but which had a very droll character.

"They are very amusing," said Julianne, who had caught some of them in their flight; "but they are not high art; and, if you are never to do any better, it is not worth while to keep on."

She could not refrain, however, from bursting into laughter at a group of gentlemen surrounding a piano, where a lady, as lean as she was bare-shouldered, was singing with might and main some sentimental stupidity. Aline, flattered, felt her good humor return, and the examination terminated amicably; but Julianne realized that her remarks were perfectly useless, and had done her child more harm than good.

Several little scenes of this kind had, in less than a week, made Madame Breton acquainted with the state of her daughter's mind. It was the logical sequel of qualities and defects manifested in her childhood; with a new germ, a worldly spirit, which had already shot forth its deep roots in this young brain.

Julienne knew that, at fifteen years of age, a character is not hardened ; and her reason repeated this to her as often as her maternal tenderness did. Meantime, the uneasiness that she felt was strong enough to carry her one day to Nogent, all by herself.

"What would you have?" said her old friend, on the first complaints ; "I told you that the boarding-school would be better. Circumstances chose to have it otherwise—so be it ; but I still think as I said."

"I was very wrong, in that case, to trust her to Robert."

Circumstances chose to have it so, I tell you. One must be made of bronze to act uniformly on the side of wisdom. Do not reproach yourself, my dear child ; that will do no good."

"I can always take my daughter back again. They offered me, if I wished, to take her out yonder. She could finish her education under my direction."

Leroy looked attentively at Julienne, with those clear eyes which had seen so many things. "Are your friends in Russia very rich?" he asked.

"Yes, very rich."

"In great luxury?"

"Better than that ; in absolute comfort. Everything is luxurious, without doubt ; but it is not the luxury which strikes one most, because it is not gaudy. Everything comes to hand at the moment named ; one has not time to wish for anything."

"All that is the very worst thing for Aline," thought the wise old man. "And the children are delicate, you tell me?" he asked aloud.

"Yes, but without being sick."

"The mother is consumptive?"

"To the last degree."

Leroy placed his bony hand on that of his god-daughter. Julianne shivered. "Would there be danger for me?" she said. "Could I have brought a germ of it to her?"

Her old friend reassured her. No, the danger for her could scarcely exist; she had been long enough in the house to be sure of immunity. But Aline, in changing her surroundings and her habits, at an age when all the influences are so active, had everything to fear.

"It is impossible," concluded he; "you ought not to think of it."

Julianne remained very much perplexed. "You are not satisfied with my daughter," said she at last; "do you think that her surroundings are bad for her here?"

"Not exactly. Do not torment yourself, my dear child. Leave your daughter where she is; the future is a great master; and, if you can imagine me to be Monsieur de la Palice, I would repeat to you that nothing teaches one how to live like living! Aline will live, please God, and the lessons she will receive will form her character."

"Do you believe that she loves me?" suddenly said Madame Breton, uncovering the hidden sore of her soul.

"She loves you, assuredly."

"Less than she does Madame Dalibaud?"

"Otherwise than Madame Dalibaud. There is the question stated, my poor child. You are jealous!"

Julianne burst into tears. No, she was not jealous; but she suffered cruelly. The habit of living

together, which caused them to refer to one another in all the details of life, had turned upon her friend the attention which Aline had given to her formerly. In Roberta's house, where Aline was at home, the effective mother was no longer Julianne, it was the mistress of the house. "She calls her 'dear madame,'" said she, "but her voice is more tender than when she says 'mamma' to me."

"And when she is married," returned Leroy, with an abruptness that hid his pain, "shall you also be angry at her speaking tenderly to her husband?"

"Ah! if that husband is like my poor Louis," cried the widow, "I shall be only too happy! But she will never love a man like her father. She needs another kind of character!"

Madame Breton was too near right; and Leroy strove to calm her and to remove her presentiments by means of a strict logic. On leaving him, Julianne was resigned to let Aline's education be finished under the same conditions. One argument had decided her.

"Madame Dalibaud has no child," the old philosopher had said; "if she does not marry again, she will probably give or bequeath something to your daughter, with a view to marrying her into her set."

"If she does not marry again," said Julianne. "At her age do you believe she can marry again?"

"While there is life there is hope," sententiously replied the undeceived old man, without laughing. "It is a risk to be run. Aline, brought up in the ideas of those people, will be happy with the fortune."

Julianne sighed; but the argument, although not

the most noble, had its foundation in truth. She left with her heart a little more at ease.

The twelfth day after Julianne's arrival in Paris, she was finishing breakfast with Aline and Roberta; the dining-room opened upon a garden, planted with some trees whose foliage created the illusion of being in the country; and the repast was very gay.

The course of Aline's studies was about ending; and they had planned their departure for the Orangery for the very next day, free to return for the Grand-Prix races, which Madame Dalibaud had missed only once—the year of her widowhood.

"And I have never seen them at all!" said Julianne.

"O mamma, when you shall have returned for good and all, we will polish you—will we not, dear madame?"

At the same moment the servant brought a telegram, which he handed to Madame Breton. She closed her eyes, thinking she saw everything turning about her; she knew beforehand what it contained—this spiteful bit of blue paper! It was the recall, the exile— And suddenly, within herself, she saw the emaciated face of Madame Lébédéf, whose dying eyes were fixed upon her with a supreme supplication. She had been ungrateful, forgetful; for twelve days she had not given two thoughts to those, over yonder, who loved her and esteemed her so much. And now she was punished for it.

"Open it, mamma," said Aline, with impatience.

Julianne obeyed, read the message, and, without saying a word, passed it to Madame Dalibaud; then she left the dining-room, hiding her face in her hands.

Aline darted toward Roberta, and read over her shoulder : " My wife is dying ; calls for you. Return to-day. Lébédéf."

" Poor Julianne !" said Madame Dalibaud.

Aline had run to rejoin her mother, whom she found in her chamber, her face buried in the pillow of her bed.

" Mamma, mamma—"

" Be reasonable !" said Julianne with bitterness. " I know. Yes. I will be ; there, it is all over. Come ! don't scold me, above all things. Where is Roberta ? I must go to the embassy and to the ministry for my passport, since I leave this evening."

" This evening ? No ; to-morrow," said Aline, with a tone of authority. " One doesn't whisk away people like that."

She had spoken with a small, dry tone ; her mother seized her by the two hands and held her, in front of herself, under her gaze.

" This evening, Aline ! My heart is broken ; but I shall leave this evening, because I have promised to do so. Let that serve as a lesson to you ! You are happy here ; you work at your leisure ; you walk out ; you go to the shops ; while I give lessons, and scold and soothe. I am the friend of an excellent woman, who is going to die ; and for two years I have waited for her last agony. All this is to earn some money, that you may, later on, be independent and happy. You see, my life is very little like yours. And, now, I have come all the way across Europe to meet you once more ; the going and coming takes me eight days and nine nights on the railroad. I am going back to be present at the last sigh of this woman, of this

mother. But, this time, I swear to you, Aline, it is not for money ! It is not even because I have promised ; it is because this woman depends upon me ; and because, if she were to die before I arrived, she would believe that I am not upright, that I had deceived her, and that I would not bring up her children. If she believed that I would not she would die hopeless ; and I—if she should die so, I should never have another day of tranquillity. Far beyond our pleasures, our habits, even our affections, there is something more grand and more noble ; and this is the thing promised, our mutual confidence, our honor. Aline, never forget that ! ”

She opened her hands ; her eyes were dry ; and her sweet voice had taken on the accents of an unknown energy. Aline looked at her with astonishment ; the strain of her mother’s hands on her wrists had left her as if with bracelets, but she did not well comprehend why these words—why this animation. In this soul, accustomed from infancy to conceal its impressions, extreme feelings had no citizenship ; Aline’s passions had never mounted to indignation, no more than her admirations to enthusiasm. She found her mother “ a little exaggerated ”—without doubt—honor, a pledged faith—everybody knew that ! But to leave the same evening—that was to push rigor too far against one’s self, and also against others. Did not Aline deserve that her mother should make her the sacrifice of remaining another day, even if it should cost her a little ?

She said nothing, however, and contented herself with keeping a significant silence. Preoccupied by the material cares for her precipitate departure, Juli-

enne could hardly perceive it. Monsieur Leroy, informed by a telegram, answered that he would be at the station "du Nord" at the hour of starting.

In driving about, Madame Breton took her daughter with her ; in the cab, which jolted them from the ministry to the embassy, she tried by fits and starts to slip in advice, recommendations, and warnings ; the fever which agitated her gave a singular force to her words, but Aline was struck with only one thing, her mother's excessive excitement.

She recalled the scenes of grief that followed her father's death, and the control which she had thought right to exercise at that moment ; from the bottom of her rarely misled soul she considered her mother as a little at sea—at least eccentric. She did not seek to remember the occasions without number where Juliette had shown coolness and foresight ; above all, during the rapid illness which had made her a widow, and when the dying man had passed away without suspecting that he was leaving for a perpetual exile—so calm, consoling, almost smiling, had his wife shown herself, while she forgot nothing. Aline forgot that it is permitted to a wife to give way to her grief when she had not relaxed for an instant during twelve mortal days and twelve nights of agonized watching.

"Mamma is very much agitated," she said to Madame Dalibaud, on coming in ; "she has always been a little like that, but to-day she makes me uneasy."

Roberta did not feel disturbed about her friend. Doubtless she was a little feverish, which was quite natural, but her whole being was in perfect balance, and she had not omitted a single detail among the exigencies of such a departure.

"Aline is singular," said that amiable woman to herself; "she sees agitation everywhere. I must find out what she means by it."

The last minute came very quickly. In the great waiting-room of the station they met Leroy; some affectionate words, some practical recommendations, and then one long, long embrace, in which Julienne strained her daughter to her breast. She was going to make one supreme recommendation to her, but she stopped herself, and said only, "Remember my words."

The train started. Julienne, standing at the door, gazed as long as she could at the little group. They had ceased to distinguish her well before she had lost sight of them, and she saw their backs as they turned toward the way out. This insignificant circumstance gave her a chill at the heart; she would have wished to see their faces to the last possible limit. She sat down in her corner, lowered her veil, crossed her hands on her knees, and fell into a doleful meditation, without tears.

This journey had been a discomfiture; she could confess it to herself now. The Aline whom she had found was not the one of whom she had dreamed; but was it she who had been at fault in dreaming, or was it Aline who had changed in a direction opposed to her wishes?

After long puzzling over it, she recognized that it was both the one and the other in the actual condition of her daughter; the worldly education had developed her natural defects, but the defects had existed beforehand; and in her mother's love Julienne had delighted in forgetting them. In speaking of Aline to her little

pupils, she had not been able to tell them how hard and selfish she was sometimes.

The thought of the little girls brought Julianne back to the object of her journey. She had sent a telegram with these words only, "I am coming." The telegram had arrived by this time, and the dying woman would be reassured. Julianne took the precaution to send the same telegram from all the important stopping-places on her journey, so as to keep up the confidence of the poor woman, if she still lived.

On the morning of the fourth day she found herself at last on the platform of the Viazma station, quite dazed, and with the impression that she had been dreaming and that her journey had not taken place. One of Monsieur Lébédéf's servants, who had been sent to meet her, informed her respectfully that the horses were ready; and she got into the carriage.

Madame Lébédéf was still living the night before; she was breathing, but that was all. Without Julianne's having need to tell him, the coachman urged on his horses, and the carriage dashed along the road like the wind. Instead of one relay, they had arranged two, so as to gain time. At the end of four hours, Madame Breton descended before the steps of the seigniorial mansion.

It had a holiday look which struck the traveler. The roses were in full blossom; flower-gardens and borders displayed the unheard-of luxury of color peculiar to countries with a short summer. The climbing plants made the richest possible mantle of verdure over the veranda. Julianne went in. Her maid was waiting for her in the hall, and presented to her, on a tray, a powerful cordial, which the traveler took me-

chanically, while allowing herself to be disembarassed of her superfluous wraps.

Without asking anything, without any one's addressing a word to her, she went directly toward Madame Lébédéf's chamber: the door was open; and she saw, at the farther end, the great bed where the poor woman, seated and supported by pillows, was breathing with painful efforts, with her eyes closed. The priest, standing between the two windows, before an improvised altar, was offering prayers; Monsieur Lébédéf, seated beside his wife, watched her broken breathings, each one of which might be her last.

The dying woman opened her eyes, and recognized Julianne; for her face brightened with an exquisite smile, and she made a movement to offer her hand. Madame Breton drew near and took this cold hand, so emaciated that she was afraid of breaking it in touching it. Upon an appeal in his wife's eyes, Monsieur Lébédéf called in the little girls, who were cowering behind the door of the next chamber; and they stood near their mother's bed, too frightened even to cry. At sight of their teacher, a flash of joy had illuminated their poor little faces; but they said nothing.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," feebly said Madame Lébédéf, making the shadow of a sign of the cross on the little heads raised toward her, "I bless you, Olinka; I bless you, Lioudmila—for life and eternity."

She was silent, closed her eyes, and those who surrounded her believed her spirit to have taken flight. She breathed still, however; and, as often happens in this strange malady, she suddenly felt better. At the end of a moment she opened her eyes and spoke.

"I thank you," she said to Madame Breton. "I bless you, and God will bless you, in your child, for what you have done for mine. I am content. Go and rest yourself."

Julienne went out, a prey to an unspeakable, delicious emotion. Yes, to be thus recompensed, this was worth the pain of having accomplished the sacrifice. The benediction, called down upon the head of the far-distant Aline by this dying mother, had stirred in her the most noble affections. She went to undress and to take some nourishment; then she proceeded to the little girls, who had been taken away to spare them these doleful sights; and she made them talk, in order to lighten their young hearts of a burden too heavy for their age.

Madame Lébédéf lived until the next morning, having Julienne called from time to time, to press her hand or to give her an affectionate look. She passed away without a struggle during her sleep.

Madame Breton retained, all through her life, from this end, a serene and satisfied impression, like that which one experiences in a magnificent temple. The grief of having to see this charming soul disappear had been foreseen for a long time; and it was less a grief than a melancholy. But the feeling of a duty accomplished, together with the serious joy which it brought to her, brightened Julienne's entire existence from this moment. It was to her like the initiation into the sacred mysteries, of which she had become an adept; and she could never think of it without feeling a sort of religious ecstasy; the benediction of the dying woman had left upon her an invisible but ineffaceable impression.

CHAPTER IX.

ALINE learned the death of Madame Lébédéf without emotion ; this family did not inspire in her any interest. Perhaps there was a little affected indifference in the disregard which she expressed for these far-away people ; it is difficult to believe that she did not experience any feeling with regard to those who held so large a share in her mother's existence. But this absent mother, herself, was less dear to her, than formerly.

In return, the personality of the young girl took on, day by day, more importance in her own eyes. In the family, the close tie, which unites all the members of it, imposes upon each one of them the obligation to think of the others, and consequently to forget one's self from time to time ; but at Madame Dalibaud's, Aline was not with her family ; she was, so to speak, on a visit ; and the moral independence, which created for her the lack of a serious tie, had led her in a short time to egoism.

These family ties are sometimes very hard to bear ; at every instant in life they come to trammel our pleasures, even our duties, and create for us a thousand difficulties. In return, how much is he to be pitied who, owing nothing to his relatives, is nothing to them ! He passes through life free and solitary, master of his own actions, without responsibilities and

without duties ; but no one has any duties toward him, and in the hour of trial he is left to struggle alone, and at the last moment to die alone. In the mean time he can very well build for himself a nest of egoism, where he settles himself in the best possible way, and finds himself quite happy until the day of grief arrives. Aline had only got, as yet, to the period of satisfaction, and this period lasted until her seventeenth year.

After Julien's departure Madame Dalibaud had, for some time, watched the character of her boarder ; and, at the end of a fortnight, she had decided that Aline had a hard soul. She opened the subject to Monsieur Leroy, who was not altogether of the same opinion.

"I do not dare, as yet, to pass a definite judgment on her," he said ; "but I believe it is rather shut up than hard. The breath of skepticism, which turns the young heads of our unruly boys, is not without influence on those of our unruly girls. One learns from these children that nothing is nothing ; that love, friendship, and duty are, if not fiction, at least illusions for the use of feeble brains ; that when one says of a man, 'He is an optimist,' it is almost as if one said, 'He is an imbecile.' I am an optimist, and am proud of it ; I am seventy-five years old ; I have seen a great many things, and vile things, and, in spite of that, I believe in human goodness, in devotion, in sacrifice ; and I even believe, dear madame, in Aline's future welfare."

Madame Dalibaud was not skeptical ; in her time, one was not so positive ; one was satisfied with thinking nothing at all, which was, perhaps, less dangerous.

She willingly accepted the idea of a future where Aline would be clothed in all the active virtues; and inas-much as, in the mean time, the young girl had no in-convenient defects, and as the degree of perfection in a human soul is not measured by any moral hydrome-ter, she thought no more about it.

Aline grew up, meantime, and became altogether remarkable. Her features had not preserved their regularity of childhood, but her face had taken on a new charm, proceeding principally from the contrast between the sweetness of her smile and the severity of her mouth in repose. When she was animated, she was delightful. Julianne received, one after the other, two portraits of her daughter, which were the admira-tion of Olinka and Lioudmila.

Monsieur Lébédéf, soon after his wife's death, had given up the care of his children to Madame Breton, and that of the house to the excellent housekeeper who had really governed it for many years. Every-thing went on according to his wishes in the great mansion; the sadness of the little girls was weakened little by little; the gravity of the widower was no longer painful, and the spring-time threw over the house the accustomed mantle of verdure. In order not to leave her pupils, Julianne had adopted the habit of going to the Russian church with them; the beauty of the chants, the nobility of the ceremonies, pleased her artistic spirit, and the simple verses of the gospel recited by the deacon touched her heart. She had learned enough Russian in these five years to explain the meaning to herself; certain words which she understood recalled the entire verse through its Slavonic imagery, and these services at the church,

which were multiplied in the country, where religious services are almost the only regular distraction, brought to her soul great calm and peacefulness.

Time went on meanwhile, slowly for some—exceedingly fast for others. Lioudmila was nearly seventeen and Olinka sixteen; six months more, and Julianne, positively free, would return to her daughter. Aline, already in possession of the simple license, was to present herself in October to obtain the superior license; and her success seemed assured. Madame Breton saw the end of her exile approaching with a singular mixture of joy and care; she was tenderly attached to the two orphans, and the thought of leaving them caused her much grief. And then one does not live for six years in a place without leaving there a little of one's self; the country people whom she had helped in their sickness, the entire *personnel* of the great house, had inspired in her a sympathy which would transform itself into regrets.

She was thinking of all this one evening, after ten o'clock, in the little parlor appropriated to her use for three years past. The two sisters had gone to bed; for the whole house was tired with having received visits, without intermission, during the three days of the festival of the patron saint of the church, which had just finished. It was the last time that Julianne would see the fair in this village. There had been ladies among the visitors who lived very far away, and who came to Nikola only once a year. She would never again see these country people who had loaded her with politeness and attentions; without doubt her heart would not suffer from this, but she would none the less experience a feeling analogous

to that which the departure of the swallows inspires in us.

Julienne was forty-one years old ; not a white hair streaked her tresses, always so thick ; not a visible wrinkle tarnished the amber-colored pallor of her complexion ; her eyes alone, which had wept so much, gave testimony of her tears by a dark circle around them. Madame Breton seemed to be ten years younger than her age ; but no coquetry appeared, to spoil the purity of her calm and maternal countenance, and the elegance of her figure did not proceed from any artifice.

She was thinking of her return to France ; the wisdom which she had acquired did not allow her to ignore that she would find there many disillusiones, and she was forcing herself to believe that Aline's tenderness would console her for everything.

Her maid came in, and asked if she could receive Monsieur Lébédéf, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour.

Surprised, Julienne got up and gave orders to let him come in. Monsieur Lébédéf presented himself, making excuses. He was going to leave the next morning, early, for an absence of a fortnight, and must see her beforehand. She offered him a seat, and waited, with a strange impression that she knew what she was going to hear.

"In five months you are going to leave us, madame," he said ; "I have been thinking of it for a long time, and I can not reconcile myself to it. My daughters are going to have more need of you than ever. Are there no means of persuading you to remain with us ?"

Julienne shook her head. She had, for a long time, feared this ; and the thought of the pain she was inflicting by her refusal was very distressing to her.

"I must tell you, first of all," resumed Monsieur L  b  def, "that your attentions were appreciated by my wife, and she has left you a pension for life ; but I do not wish to speak to you of that at present. Tell me, Madame Breton, are there any means of inducing you to remain with us ?"

The particular insistence which he placed on his words only confirmed Julienne's impression. She knew what he was going to say, and she would have given much to stop him ; but what could she do ?

"I have duties toward my daughter," said she ; "as you know, Monsieur. These duties are not less imperative than those which brought me back here."

"Yes, I understand. Listen to me. We have offered you to have Mademoiselle Aline come here ; you have not spoken of it again to us, from which I have concluded that you did not wish it. That wounded me a little at first, I confess ; and then, on reflection, I understood that you were right. It was not proper, in fact, that your daughter should live, even with you, in a widower's house."

He paused, and passed his hand over his beard, which was scarcely shaded by threads of silver. Julienne opened her mouth, then shut it again. Better to wait awhile yet.

"But now, Madame Breton," resumed he, "I have found a way which will arrange everything, if you are willing. Do me the honor to marry me, and our children will never leave us, except for their own marriages."

Julienne had lowered her head and was looking at a rose on the table-cover ; that rose always dwelt in her eyes with the recollection of this conversation.

"Monsieur," said she, "I understand the generosity of your proposal—"

"No," said he, simply, "there is no generosity in it. I do not wish to tell a falsehood ; the feelings with which you have inspired me are those of respect, of friendship, of veneration ; without that, I should not dare to speak to you as I have done, within two steps of my daughters, who are no longer children ; I ask you to be their mother, rather than to be my wife. It was that which made me suppose you might accept."

Julienne was touched to the bottom of her heart by this delicacy, and she raised upon him a look of thankfulness.

"Do you accept ?" said he, quickly.

"No," answered she at once. "You can not imagine, monsieur, how gratified I am at this thought which honors me as much as it honors yourself. But my duty toward my daughter forbids me to accept."

"Why ?"

"Why ? Ah ! it is impossible to explain. I feel it, but I can not express it. My daughter is a good and respectable child ; but—"

"She is not like you ?" interrupted Monsieur L  b  def.

"It is not only that ; but I do not know her. I have lived far away from her for six years, and I know almost nothing of her soul ; she is pretty, educated, intelligent, and yet I feel, I imagine, that she is going to occupy me every moment of my life ; that I must

consecrate myself to her entirely, alone ; and that I could not reconcile this duty with that which I would have contracted toward your children. No ; I should fulfill one or the other badly ; and on your children's account, as on mine, I must refuse, monsieur—understand that."

He did understand it, although he was broken-hearted. "However, Madame Breton, think of it ; your daughter will marry one day or another, perhaps soon ; and then you will be left alone ; would it not be better to accept my proposal ? She will have the opportunity to be married with us as well as with you ; and afterward we will grow old together quietly, instead of growing old desolate."

"And my responsibility, monsieur ?" said Julienne. "And if my daughter, whom I do not know, so to speak, should not agree with yours ? You make me say things, which are very painful for a mother. I shall have an eternal gratitude to you for this ; but, monsieur, I beg of you, do not speak to me of it any more."

Monsieur Lébédéf got up. "You are an upright woman, Madame Breton," said he ; "and perhaps, at bottom, you are right. But I regret it, I regret it very much, I assure you. As a father, I was happy to think I was securing the welfare of my children. I can understand that you, as a mother, should be anxious, above everything, for the future of your own. We will never speak of it again. Be calm, Madame Breton ; I will not annoy you."

He gave her an energetic shake of the hand, and went out. The next day, when Julienne got up, he had been gone for two hours to the factory.

More than once, during the five months she yet remained at Nikola, she asked herself if she had done well. Was it wise, in short, to renounce all the advantages which such a marriage offered to her daughter and to herself ; which gave her a fortune, a situation beyond comparison ? On mature reflection, Julianne was confirmed in the idea that she had chosen the better part. Aline was not one of those insignificant beings whom one can transplant into any kind of earth ; and no one could say what result would have followed a change of life, which was well calculated to turn even a well-balanced head. Moreover, the position of step-daughter in Monsieur Lébédéf's house would never be equal to that of his own daughters ; and Aline (her mother was sure) had too much pride to accept the least difference.

The time of separation arrived. The last weeks had passed so rapidly that Madame Breton was stupefied on finding herself at the day of departure. Loaded with souvenirs and presents from the whole household, from friends and neighbors, from the poor peasants themselves, who had embroidered towels of open-work linen, like lace, Julianne saw, piled upon a cart, a heap of boxes and parcels very different from the solitary trunk which she had brought six years before. She carried away a small fortune in her pocket-book, and a square piece of paper valid on the house of Rothschild ; moreover, she knew from her pupils that she would receive regularly a life-pension of twenty-four hundred francs. This was bread for her old age, security for her whole life ; and Julianne's heart was full to overflowing in thinking of the good fortune which her sojourn at Nikola had brought into her life.

More even than the pecuniary independence (so important, however) she blessed the tender and grateful affection of the two sisters, all in tears, who clasped her in their arms and demanded of her still another kiss. These pretty, fresh, educated young girls were her work! For six years, she had never ceased to pour into these young souls the knowledge of things and the respect for truths; they were sweet and good, for nature had favored them; but might not the defects of former times, under a less careful management, have choked the better impulses?

"We owe you everything; yes, everything—after mamma and my father," said Olinka, whose blue eyes were like two fountains. "If we are happy, Madame Breton, we owe it to you, with God's help!"

She started; and for a long, long time, she saw the two young girls and their father, who watched the train disappear on the iron-way, straight out of sight.

"It is a large piece of my life that I have left there," she said; "but, at least, I bring away only the best recollections."

In recalling the pure and loyal conduct of Monsieur Lébédéf, who, in fact, had never made any further allusion to their conversation, it occurred to her to open a little parcel which he had handed to her at the last moment. It was a casket containing a medallion covered with diamonds, with the portrait of his two young daughters. On pressing a spring, she could raise the setting of precious stones. A line of writing from Monsieur Lébédéf appeared: "In case of misfortune." At this last proof of friendly forethought, Julianne wept without constraint.

The journey appeared to her horribly long. The

impatience which sustained her on her first journey was wanting now ; she was almost afraid to arrive, and at the same time it seemed to her that the car-wheels slipped on the rails instead of advancing. She had, moreover, a very grave subject of trouble, which made her foresee a thousand difficulties.

For a long time already Julianne, in speaking of her plans to Madame Dalibaud, had broached the delicate subject of Aline's return to the maternal fire-side. This idea had provoked, in the amiable Roberta, a real flame of indignation.

"What !" she had cried, "Having had Aline for six years at my house, treating her like my own daughter, you must come to take her from me, as one takes away an object that has been loaned ? It is unheard of ; one doesn't do that ! One never heard of such a thing !"

With an unfailing patience Julianne had tried to explain. Of course, she recognized the rights created by her friend's goodness ; but her daughter was her daughter ; she had been deprived of her for six years, and was it not just that she should, at last, have her near herself ?

To these arguments Roberta had opposed one which had thrust a thorn into Madame Breton's heart. "Let your daughter choose, herself !" she had written.

Julianne had great fear that Aline's choice was not in her favor ; in spite of all she could say to herself, a secret instinct urged her to believe that Aline would much prefer the house where she had every comfort, where she enjoyed an independence almost complete, to the home, necessarily less rich, where her

mother intended to establish a course of lessons for young girls. And if Aline should abandon her mother, what misery !

As on the first occasion, Julianne found her daughter and her friend waiting for her at the station. The sight of Aline rejoiced her heart, in spite of all her fears ; she was even more charming than her portraits had shown her to be. Madame Dalibaud, on the contrary, complained of the advance of age, and perhaps the brilliant beauty of her companion helped to render the contrast more striking. The judicious use of rice-powder, aided by a little rose-color, the crisp little curls which concealed the wrinkles, the pencil which accentuated her eyebrows, did not succeed in giving back her vanished youth.

The greeting was very tender on both sides ; one would have said that the two Parisians were competing in affection for the traveler, and were disputing about it in the manner of cats, whose politeness is often emphasized by a little pat of the claw. Astonished, Julianne allowed matters to go on ; they arrived at Madame Dalibaud's, where Julianne's bed was prepared, as before, in her daughter's chamber.

Hardly were they alone together, when Aline threw herself on her mother's neck ; and, kissing her, whispered in her ear, "Do you know, mamma, that you must take me away from here, and without losing any time about it ?"

Madame Breton opened her eyes very wide, and wished to ask an explanation.

"No, no ; later, I will tell you everything ; but arrange to take me away !"

They came to call them to breakfast, and Julianne

had to stop there. After the meal, Aline having disappeared, Madame Dalibaud said to her friend, "How do you find your daughter?"

"Charming. I do not know how to thank you for the care you have taken of her!"

"It is not worth mentioning," said the amiable woman, negligently; "Aline has cost me nothing, so to speak, since you have paid her masters, and she has given me much satisfaction. Have you any plans?"

"I have several. Of which do you speak?"

"Plans of settling yourself. Have you an apartment in view?"

"I confess I have not; I have just arrived—"

"There is a very pretty one, and not dear, in the Rue Lafayette; and if, as you intended, you wish to establish a school there, it would suit you very well. It is on the second floor; it has a very large parlor, a pretty dining-room, a chamber for yourself and one for Aline, dressing-rooms, closets—in short, everything one could wish."

"Ah!" thought Julianne; "a chamber for Aline?"

"If you wish, and if you are not too tired, we will go and look at it at once; it is not ten minutes from here. It is an opportunity, which one ought not to let slip."

"Let us go," answered Julianne simply.

Her daughter came in, and she watched her deportment toward Madame Dalibaud. In Aline's bearing there was a dash of banter, very delicate and hidden under a varnish of good manners. In that of Madame Dalibaud, a temper skillfully concealed, but which showed through at times.

"What has happened?" asked Julianne of her

daughter, while they were putting on their bonnets to go out.

A flash of malice showed itself in Aline's eyes, who replied, without excitement : " Wait ! I will tell you everything."

CHAPTER X.

MADAME BRETON found that the apartment in the Rue Lafayette would suit her. Not that it did not seem very small, with low ceilings, scanty, after the spacious dwelling she had just left; but the arrangement was convenient, and the situation favorable to the project of a school, which Julianne had never abandoned.

"Mamma," said Aline, as she and her mother were coming down-stairs, "let us go and look at furniture; there is some very pretty a little higher up the street."

"You are in a great hurry—the lease is not signed yet!"

"That makes no difference; we can go and look, and then you will sign to-morrow at the landlord's, and we will move in on Thursday."

"On Thursday? To-day is Monday."

"Yes, yes; on Thursday."

Julianne stopped short in the street, and looked at her daughter. "Come, Aline; we must stop this little game, which amuses you but which annoys me. What has happened, and why are you in such haste to leave Madame Dalibaud?"

"Mamma," said the very wise Aline, with a smile as clear as amber, "let us go on, or you will make everybody look at us."

This judicious remark put Julianne in motion again; but her gaze scarcely left the eyes of her daughter, who decided (while guiding her toward the furniture-store) to reveal to her at least a part of the truth.

"You wish to know? Very well; listen!" said she, with a tragi-comic tone. "Your friend, the charming Madame Dalibaud, has a mind to marry again."

Julienne stopped so short that a gentleman, rushing along at full speed behind her, could not altogether avoid hitting against her in turning out. The shock started her on again, but without restoring her presence of mind.

"Mamma," resumed the pitiless Aline, "I presume that in Russia the streets are wider, since one stops there to talk, or else that there are fewer people passing; but here it will be very difficult. I think we would do better to resume this conversation at home."

"Aline," said Julianne, in a peremptory tone, "I require you to finish this at once!"

The young girl understood that she had gone too far, and put on a most serious look.

"Madame Dalibaud certainly has a mind to marry again. Last winter, under the pretext of offering me a little amusement, she gave four or five evening parties. Oh, not large parties! There were recitations; they served tea at half-past eleven; there was no dancing; in short—informal! There were only about fifty persons."

"Many young girls?" asked Julianne.

"The fewest girls possible. I do not know how it happens, but Madame Dalibaud's friends have no

daughters—only sons ! and they are all at the Lyceum ! Or else, if they have daughters, they hide them. But there were ladies, and also gentlemen."

Aline spoke with so grave a tone that it was impossible for her mother to know whether she was joking or not ; the peculiar accent of Parisian banter would betray nothing, in its manner of being and speaking, to a woman who had lived all her life in the provinces, and for the last six years abroad ; but yet Julianne felt an instinctive distrust with regard to her daughter's words. This cruel Parisian banter, so droll to those who like it, so bitterly obscure and indecipherable to whomsoever is not accustomed to it ! Made up of unexpressed mockery, of cold irony, of impassive teasing, so managed sometimes that one can not exactly fix the instant when he who uses it has ceased to speak seriously to mock at himself ! It was unknown Sanskrit to Julianne, and to Aline it was almost the ordinary language, to the extent that a young girl could allow herself, for she never overstepped the proper limits ; that was a part of her system.

"Mamma, you break my heart with your look of distrust !" resumed Mademoiselle Breton, without turning toward Julianne her pretty face, which was a little more supercilious than usual, but which displayed at this moment an irresistible malice. "Can't you simply believe what I tell you ? There were gentlemen at Madame Dalibaud's parties—gentlemen of all ages, principally young. For a while—for two months at least—I thought that Madame Dalibaud invited the young ones for me and the others for herself ; but by the end of the third month I had acquired the absolute conviction that it was quite the other way !"

Julienne had resolved to say nothing more; she walked alongside her daughter, listening to her words and trying to give them their exact meaning, which was not very easy for her to do.

"Quite the contrary!" replied Aline. "The old ones came for me, and the young— Wait, mamma; here is the furniture-shop I spoke of. Look at that sideboard; how well that would answer! In the glazed cupboard, with those mirrors behind the bottles, you could, if necessary, put your pupils' exercises—exercises to be corrected, of course! That would also take the place of silver-ware—which one no longer sees."

The furniture was not dear; that is to say, they asked for it half the price of the first purchase, which always amazes beginners in this kind of trading. Madame Breton was surprised to see the skill that her daughter brought to it, and the unerring taste that she showed in it. In spite of his cleverness, the merchant could not make her take stained beech for pear-tree wood.

"I should have been cheated fifty times," thought Julienne; "and this urchin of eighteen years will dispute about it with this old man. And she had found time to learn all this while she was preparing for her examinations! What a pity there was no way of telling whether she was joking or serious!"

"Very well, monsieur; we will think about it," said Aline, with an unconcerned air. "You have given your lowest price for the two chambers and the dining-room? You can't make any reduction? As for the parlor, we have something in view.—Come, mamma, we will go and look at it.—Good-morning, monsieur."

She took her mother away, leaving the merchant perplexed, and ready to grant a further reduction.

"That will be very pretty," said she, "and he will come down yet two or three hundred francs."

"But the parlor?" said Julienne.

"The parlor? We have plenty of time. I have something in view—only it is not for sale; but we will have one made like it."

Madame Breton had understood that she could not find out, that day, what it was which troubled her so much at heart. She allowed herself to be dragged by her daughter from shop to shop, looking, comparing, taking measures, but buying nothing; and she came back to her friend's, about seven o'clock, as completely worn out as a woman could be who tries to furnish a house after having passed five days and five nights on a railroad.

The old philosopher seemed very happy at seeing his goddaughter again. He also loaded Madame Dalibaud with gallant compliments, which she did not seem to receive with her former graciousness; she still smiled, but with an absent look, like a woman whose mind is elsewhere. Aline, on the contrary, frankly put herself on a footing of coquetry with her mother's old friend, who continued to treat her as a little girl, which she pretended to find mortifying.

"Grandfather," she cried, toward the end of the repast, "you think me older than I am!"

"Why?" asked Monsieur Leroy, without being disturbed.

"Because you do not wish to see that I am making love to you. The other gentlemen—the old ones—are much more amiable than you!"

"Aline!" said Madame Dalibaud, "it seems to me that you are going beyond—"

"Oh, my good friend, I was speaking only of the old gentlemen—the respectable ones! I know very well that I am still too young for the others to take any notice of me."

Under the rice-powder and the dabs of paint, which adorned her cheeks, Madame Dalibaud colored furiously.

"Have you taken your apartment?" she said, turning toward Julienne.

"I intend signing the lease to-morrow," answered Julienne, who began to understand.

"We shall be settled on Thursday," said Aline, with a satisfied air; "and we shall have a day—shall we not, mamma—one day for the ladies, and one evening for the gentlemen? It is much more agreeable to have them separate; is it not, my good friend?"

Monsieur Leroy's blue eyes sparkled with malice; but he took out his snuff-box with an air so grave that Julienne thought she must have mistaken his expression.

"When one wishes to receive," solemnly answered Madame Dalibaud, "one must invite the husbands with their wives."

"Oh, yes; but the widows and the bachelors? They like better to come when there are no married women—when there are only ourselves, I would say. We will have an evening; not the same as yours, my good friend, otherwise we would never have anybody."

Leaving her "good friend" to enjoy this pill, Aline turned toward her mother.

"You must make yourself pretty, mamma, and show a little of your neck ; not much—like that only." And she showed the width of her finger. "My good friend also, a little more ; myself none at all, because I am a girl. I will wear an all-round collar, up to there !" And she pointed to her ears, with a gesture so droll that Madame Dalibaud could not help laughing, like the others.

"Isn't this your evening ?" asked Julienne of her friend. "If you will allow me, I will not appear. I am too tired ; and Aline will come with me to my room."

"Not at all—not at all !" said Roberta ; "you must stay here. It is an excellent occasion to present you to my friends—who will be yours, I am sure."

About half-past nine the bell began to ring, without stopping, until a dozen friends made their appearance. Aline had unbuttoned two buttons at the top of her mother's dress, and had ruffled some lace in the opening, which seemed enough to everybody. Madame Dalibaud exposed a little more neck, as the young girl had said ; she even exposed enough of it to surprise Julienne, but the skin was very pretty, as Monsieur Leroy affirmed, without losing any of his phlegm ; and nobody seemed to wish to complain of it.

The friends of the charming Roberta belonged, in fact, to two well-marked categories : it was not the ancient and the new, it was the young and the old. Among the old, there could be found the new ; and among the young one could discover the ancients, whom Madame Dalibaud had known college-students, with sleeves too short, and who had become very "swell" young men, with sleeves too long, from which their juvenile bony fingers stuck out.

This "young troop," as Aline called them, affected toward the old men a correct stiffness, and addressed compliments to the mistress of the house only in a low and mysterious voice. These compliments were, themselves, expressed in a morose, almost brutal, fashion, like truths to which one yielded with a bad grace. The old men, on the contrary, delicately uttered their homage in a loud voice.

"Tell me, mamma," said Aline, quite low, "which do you like best?"

"Not the young men!" replied Monsieur Leroy, who had overheard; for he had a remarkably fine ear. "In my time, a compliment was offered like a box of sugar-plums; the new school uses it as a good Englishwoman would a sponge, to wash your face roughly. In my time, one seemed to wish to give you pleasure."

"Oh!" said Aline, "this gives pleasure all the same, inasmuch as these gentlemen are not lavish with it—Mamma, look! Here is the king of the *salons*; he is always the last to arrive, in order that people may notice him."

The young girl's voice had become sharper, her tone more aggressive. While Julianne was looking at the new-comer, Leroy was watching Aline, whose eyes had suddenly become dark; her mouth had taken on a hard wrinkle; and the way in which she turned her head showed a scornful purpose. The wise old man smiled, and asked the name of this brilliant being.

"Léon Dorsay," answered Aline, "without the apostrophe; which sounds quite as well."

"What does he do—this gentleman?" asked Leroy, in his tone of good-fellow.

"Business !"

It was vague ; however, Leroy was satisfied with it for the moment.

Léon Dorsay, without the apostrophe, was about thirty-five years old, probably more ; but one could not swear to it. He was what one calls a fine fellow, without anything in his person being really fine : large, a little stiff, with an elegant mustache, blue cold eyes, hair of an undecided color carefully arranged like Capoul's ; clothed by a clever tailor—he produced a good deal of effect. On seeing him, Madame Dalibaud showed a certain emotion, and gave him her pretty hand with the smile of a woman touched to the heart. Aline's eyes were fixed upon them for an instant, and then turned with an affected indifference to the tea-table.

"Did you see ?" asked Leroy of Juliette, who was seated close to his arm-chair—"did you see this pretty gentleman ? Well, he is the cause of your tramp this morning. It is he who makes you go to housekeeping on Thursday."

Juliette's eyes expressed an innocent stupefaction, at which the good man smiled.

"Your friend has a mind to marry again ; and here is the man she has chosen," continued he.

"But he is ten years younger than she !" exclaimed the innocent, almost in a loud voice.

"Not so much, perhaps ; she is forty-two or three ; and he is not far from forty, himself, in spite of his coxcomb appearance. Don't you understand, then, that she does not wish to have about her such a charming girl as yours ?"

"Yes, I comprehend," said Madame Breton, slowly,

turning her eyes from Aline to Roberta. "And Aline ; what does she think about it ?" added she, at once moved to the bottom of her motherly soul.

"She will tell us, perhaps," answered Monsieur Leroy, evasively.

Aline was giving out the tea ; several men were grouped about the table where she was performing this pretty little service, and talking to her with a mixture of good-fellowship and stiffness, which was the tone of the day, where one always seems to be taking back with one hand what he has just been giving with the other. On three or four occasions, the young girl came to present to her mother those with whom she had been talking ; and Juliette was able to assure herself of the esteem which Aline inspired in this somewhat fantastic gathering.

It was Madame Dalibaud who should have presented her friends to Juliette, but she was so much occupied with herself that she did not think of it. Her friend looked at her with profound astonishment ; asking herself how it could happen that a woman, well brought up, a little spoiled it is true, but belonging to good society in every way, could so far disregard her duties and forget the habits of a lifetime.

"What would you have ?" answered Leroy to his goddaughter's secret thoughts ; "she is taken ; oh ! very much taken ! She loves that great creature, called Léon Dorsay ! And she loves him absurdly, that is evident enough ! She will think of others when he has left. And I will bet that he is not going to stay long ! His minutes should be worth money, to judge by his attitude of reigning prince."

Dorsay had been talking with Madame Dalibaud

in an attitude at once respectful and familiar ; leaning on the mantel-piece, lightly bending toward the arm-chair where she was seated, and thus obliging her to raise her head in order to speak to him, he let fall upon her the manna of his kindly smiles. After several minutes of this conversation, which had created a space around them, sending off the other guests—it might be to the tea-table, or it might be to the distant corners—he leaned still nearer, and put a question to Madame Dalibaud, who answered with a somber air. All at once, she got up and came toward Julienne, followed by her favorite.

“Monsieur Léon Dorsay,” said she, without too much good-will, “Madame Breton.”

“You have a charming daughter, madame,” said Dorsay, bowing. “I am glad to be allowed to present my respects to the mother of so accomplished a person.”

His attitude clearly demanded permission to sit down, in order to continue the conversation ; Julienne made the expected gesture, and Madame Dalibaud marched off with the majesty of an outraged queen.

The “great creature,” as Monsieur Leroy had irreverently designated him, could be extremely enchanting when he wished. Like most people with a cold manner, he knew how to give value to his attentions, in such a way that persons whom he distinguished would have a very definite feeling that he was making an exception in their favor. He talked for a quarter of an hour with Julienne and Monsieur Leroy, who was soon included in their conversation, and knew how to give a good impression.

On seeing him near her mother, Aline had repressed

a slight smile ; she approached, the instant after, with a cup of tea for Julianne ; but she went away again after the exchange of a few indifferent words. Dorsay followed her with his eyes, with an unequivocal admiration, but without saying anything, however ; and then concentrated his attention on Madame Breton.

When he left her, Julianne was quite amazed at having been so much at her ease with this unknown.

"He is a knave," said Monsieur Leroy, getting up to go ; "he made you say everything he wished, and you know nothing about him. He is very clever, very clever ; you must look out for yourself."

"For what ?" asked Julianne.

"That he doesn't take your daughter from you ; and that you do not give her to him, without knowing what he brings to you in exchange."

"You believe, then, that he thinks of Aline ? But, in that case—"

The place was not favorable to a confidential conversation ; and Monsieur Leroy said tranquilly to his goddaughter : "You think one can not chase two hares at the same time ? A mistake, my dear child ! Besides, if I am deceived, why should you move to the Rue Lafayette on Thursday ? That is a rather hasty movement ! Come and ask me to breakfast one of these days, and we will confess your daughter, if it can be done ; but, if we get anything out of her, I shall be very much astonished !"

"Did you understand, this time, mamma ?" demanded Aline when they found themselves alone.

Julianne made an affirmative sign with her head, but went no further.

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DALIBAUD did everything to assist the settlement of her friends in their apartment ; not content with putting all her servants at their disposal, she contributed, herself, by a hundred ingenious ideas, to facilitate the arrangements. Aline had a surprise at finding in her room a very pretty bureau, in Louis XVI style, of mahogany, ornamented with brass, fit to satisfy the best taste and to withstand all criticism. This was, besides, the moment for an exchange of presents altogether extraordinary ; and if it is true that small presents maintain friendship, that of the three women ought to find itself consolidated for a long time.

Few pens can be sufficiently eloquent to express the feeling of relief which the charming Roberta experienced when, on the day of their installation, after having dined with her, Madame and Mademoiselle Breton went to pass the night at their home, their own home. The door once closed on her friends, the lovely woman went back to her arm-chair in the chimney corner—she had renounced the lounge, which gave her a tendency to stoutness—and felt herself, for the first time in six years, alone, absolutely alone at home. Seized with a childish joy, she could not resist a desire to smile, like that of the provincial pupils who march in a body to music, and who painfully

draw down the corners of their mouths to prevent their going up to their ears, in the excess of their satisfaction. She smiled to such purpose that she finished by laughing aloud and rubbing her hands, as if she had played a good trick on Destiny.

Nevertheless, it was with an absolute good-will that Madame Dalibaud had taken charge of Aline six years before; she had done it, half from a desire to oblige her friend, and half—would it not be more exact to say, that she thought, almost only, of the pleasure of having this pretty and intelligent child, so well bred, above all, in her house?

And now Aline no longer amused her at all—at all—although she had become incomparably more amusing. It was because—Monsieur Leroy had guessed aright—Roberta's heart had spoken.

Yes, she had discovered a heart—this amiable worldling, hitherto without any vivid emotions—and even a very garrulous heart. This heart was hung to Léon Dorsay's mustache; and there it remained, hanging between heaven and earth, but much nearer to earth than heaven.

"What!" one might say, "a woman of forty-three, rich, happy, surrounded by friends, so unreasonable, taken by a man younger than herself? Is it really possible?"

It certainly was not advisable, but it was possible; so possible that Roberta, after having discovered—not without a sweet flutter—the state of her soul, resolved at once to marry Léon Dorsay, if, indeed, he would consent to it.

Why should he not consent? Madame Dalibaud had an idea that he would consent to it very willingly;

he had with her those tender and respectful manners which announce, in a man, the only feelings compatible with marriage. The difference of age ? No doubt it existed ; but less, very much less, than was generally supposed, from what Léon had made her understand in their conversations.

There remained the question of fortune. That of Madame Dalibaud was in solid investments, in charge of a reliable notary—one of those notaries who despise modern inventions, and, in point of investments, admit only the funds of the state. These notaries are rare, but they exist ; and the amiable woman had had the good fortune to find one of them in her family. Less income, but no risk ; the income, besides, was large enough to prevent any regrets.

On the part of Léon Dorsay, the question of money seemed clear to Roberta ; he was something in a newly established but considerable banking-house. Its great means allowed him to deal only with safe transactions, and thus to obtain solid revenues, of which he employed the greater part in new operations. That is how he had explained it to Madame Dalibaud, who thought she had perfectly understood it, but who in reality was only dazzled. Dorsay's confidences had drawn out those of the widow ; and, like a true friend, he had warmly congratulated her on possessing such a trusty notary ; only, from that day, he had been very attentive to Aline, until then as perfectly ignored as if she were a young lady who did not belong to the house.

It was already for some time that Aline had been casting glances at Dorsay, but he had not perceived it, because she glanced at him so little at a time. The

young speculator (some called him a *boursicotier**) had respectfully and amicably inquired about Aline's position. An only child? A mother who was bringing a round sum back from Russia?—a round sum! This was becoming interesting. Not very large? So much the worse; but so much beauty. One could enlarge on the subject of beauty, and even on that of mind.

But Madame Dalibaud did not like this kind of enlarging, and she made him understand this by turning it off short. Dorsay waited for a favorable opportunity, and asked his friend (knowing her generous heart) if she had never thought of helping Aline to get married; not by introducing her into society, but in a more material way; in a word, would she give her or bequeath her some money?

The irresistible Léon had been, on this day, particularly fascinating; and, to make this absurd question pass off, he had expended, in advance, an infinite quantity of grace and charm. The question did pass off; and Madame Dalibaud answered, without mistrust: "Oh! certainly, but as late as possible."

Dorsay continued to look at Aline. She despised him, or thought she despised him, profoundly. Didn't he see that her good friend was older than he? She could not suspect any sordid interest, since he pretended to be rich. What was the little game, then, that he was playing with this woman? She could have beaten him, if she could have given herself up to a gratification so much beyond the proprieties.

But, one afternoon in autumn, Dorsay, who had come a little too soon for dinner at the Orangery, found

* Curb-stone broker.

himself alone with Aline and talked with her for half an hour. He said nothing to her which all the world might not have heard : he did not utter any exact words ; his looks themselves were innocent ; and yet, when Madame Dalibaud came to join them, not without some uneasiness, Aline had the conviction that Dorsay loved her ; that he had acted as he did only to be near her ; and that, so soon as her mother should return, he would ask for her in marriage. She perceived then that her pretended hate was quite another thing ; and that never in her life had she found the sky so blue, nor the dinner so good, as on that day.

Ever since then she had lived in a state of mind particularly full of charm ; her nature did not prompt her either to reverie or depression ; her internal satisfaction displayed itself by a special aptitude to see the comic or ridiculous side of things and people ; her mocking gayety overflowed like a stream of sparkling wine ; and Madame Dalibaud was not long in finding her insupportable.

Aline was too correct and Dorsay too clever for anything to betray a tie between them which did not exist ; but, if love is often blind, it is on the other hand sometimes gifted with a very sharp sense of divination, above all, when it is a question of things which can be disagreeable to it ; and Roberta understood, divined, or suspected that she had a rival in Aline, and from that time she never finished her prayers without adding one for the happy return of Julienne.

Dorsay was sharp, Monsieur Leroy had said. He was so, in fact, for he knew how to find a way—and it was not easy—to have himself invited at the same time with Madame and Mademoiselle Breton, and, once

there, he asked and obtained permission to present himself at their house. These ladies did not receive in the evening, but they had taken a day, and, as Aline had very judiciously observed, the persons whom they would have to see, being for the most part the same as those who called upon Madame Dalibaud, they chose the same day as the latter, on account of the proximity. Julianne did not understand, and her daughter had not explained to her, that she aimed above all things to secure herself against a possible incursion on the part of her good friend ; but the day was chosen, and the Breton ladies received the compliments of all those persons who like to make their visits in sequence.

Madame Breton had no intention of basing her relations solely upon Madame Dalibaud's visitors. Her residence in Russia had rendered her interesting in the eyes of many people hitherto rather indifferent in regard to her ; they had inquired about her among friends, and had brought themselves to her recollection, and hence the first visits she had made to old acquaintances were received in a manner to encourage her.

If she had returned after six years of intense work, but without being worth a sou, poor Julianne would not have found a person to remember her ; but a lady, well dressed, who had money and a pretty apartment, and who wished to open a school for young girls, became at once so much more worthy of notice than if—according to a vulgar phrase, but which very well expresses the secret thought of a crowd of people—"she had no need of it to get along."

Monsieur Leroy still knew enough influential persons, in many different sets, to send to his goddaugh-

ter a nucleus of pupils, and the famous school opened with a dozen young girls, to whom Julienne taught the elements of everything, and Aline the superfluity of the rest.

Aline had a horror of instruction. She had a way of opening a book which informed you at once all about it; it was scarcely possible to include so much contempt in so simple a gesture. She accomplished her task always, not from respect for the task, but from respect for herself, which produced a doubtful sort of teacher. But "Mademoiselle Breton" was so fine a person, and even her contempt for learning had such a grand air, that her young pupils doted on her, and esteemed her infinitely above the conscientious Julienne.

Aline had quite another thing in her head than teaching. Léon Dorsay came but seldom to her mother's, and although, at each one of his visits, she felt the existence of the invisible tie which bound them, yet his silence annoyed her much. The positive mind of the young girl was not formed to nourish idle fancies; what she expected was an honest demand in marriage, which did not come. This made her fretful, and she scolded two of her little pupils so severely that they cried for three days.

"Aline," said her mother one evening when they were alone together after their dinner, "it is necessary that you should know one thing: we have not the right to vent our griefs and our personal annoyances upon others. You were unjust to those little girls—I think your conscience has already reproached you for it; but—"

"My conscience!" replied Aline, with eye and

cheek on fire. "Mamma, I beg you to believe that my conscience is at rest, and has no wish to be troubled."

"In that case, I pity you!" replied Julianne, feeling her heart to fail her.

The rebellions of former times rose up before her with a surprising clearness, calling up the whole of a grievous past which she had believed dead, and which was only torpid. During the three or four months that she had lived with her daughter, their lives, side by side but not mingled, had never blended for a single instant.

Ten times a day Madame Breton perceived, by a word, by an inflection of the voice, often even by less than that—by silence, for example—that the gulf already existing between her and her daughter was always growing deeper. It was not in external things that this divergence of opinions manifested itself most—it was in the way of moral or simply intellectual ideas. Monsieur Leroy, when consulted by his god-daughter on this subject, had characterized their position in a word.

"You go to the same church," he had said, "but you do not worship the same God."

"What is the remedy?" Julianne had asked, quite discouraged.

"I know of but one, and I can not wish that for your child."

"Speak!"

"Misfortune!" finished the old philosopher, making haste to soften, by tender words, whatever cruelty this judgment might seem to have.

Aline did not seem made for misfortune; her gayety,

a little keen, the freshness of her juvenile beauty, demanded a life without storms, in order to blossom out in freedom ; but Leroy, who had not forgotten the tragic expression formerly assumed by these elegant features, was not assured of the future.

"Your daughter is disputatious," said he to Madame Breton ; "and whoever seeks a quarrel, always finds somebody to talk to. Only one thing can subdue her—love ; but it must be a real love, an attachment where her heart is concerned, and not her head."

CHAPTER XII.

ONE Sunday afternoon, Aline having wished to go and breakfast with one of her school companions, with whom she was sufficiently intimate, Julianne found herself alone in the house. This moment of solitude did not weigh upon her; quite the contrary. Like all those who bear and feel the weight of responsibility, she needed, from time to time, an absolute relaxation, which she did not get often enough.

That morning, on seating herself at table, Madame Breton had received a letter, which called up before her very dear recollections which had been banished by the exigencies of the present to an exaggerated distance.

"I am going to be married," Lioudmila wrote to her; "dear little madame, it must seem very queer to you that I write you this, and it seems very odd to me also; for it is not yet six months since you corrected my French orthography; and you have told me, many times, that a young lady has no right to marry so long as she does not understand orthography; but, the more is the pity, I shall marry all the same, and my husband may blush for his wife if he has a mind to. Besides, he doesn't know French as well as I do, after all. You know him, my dear little madame; it is Alexandre Ovtsenko; that great lout, at whom I used to laugh

so much three or four years ago. He is no longer so stupid, or perhaps it is that I no longer see him in the same way; but we have talked together, my dear little madame, and I love him with all my heart. It troubles me very much to think that I am going to leave my sister and papa, and that they will be sad without me; but papa is satisfied, or at least he says he is; for he has a very unsatisfied expression when he thinks no one is looking at him. We have arranged with Olinka that, when she too is married, we will have papa with each of us for six months in the year, or else we will go and live with him; in that way he will never be altogether alone; and then, please God, he will have his little grandchildren, to give him his second youth. We miss you very much, my little madame; we would have been glad to have you here to rejoice with us; think of us, and above all of your little Lioudmila, who owes half of her happiness to you, since it was you who brought her up in a way to render her worthy of the love of this excellent and kind man, Alexandre Ovtsenko, whom I adore."

The little bride of seventeen would have poured out big tears if she had seen those which her dear little madame shed on reading this almost infantile letter, which was yet imbued with the grammatical principles of her teacher, until the cry from her heart, at the end, alone emancipated her and defied the syntax. Julienne, in reading, had felt her eyes fill with tears; and she had let them overflow without taking heed of them.

Her life at the big house came back to her memory, so recent still, and yet so far, so far! These young girls whom she had adored; the father, attentive and respectful; the servants accustomed to her, who, in

her turn, was used to them; the large life, without preoccupations; the neighbors and friends, who made a great deal of her—all this had been very sweet and very dear to her heart. While she was enjoying it, she had not tasted the real charm of it; preoccupied only with her daughter, she had only looked at the future; and behold, this abrupt return into the past had awakened in her a profound melancholy.

She appreciated it all now; she had been happy out there, loved, esteemed, valued at her own worth; and she suddenly felt that, since her return, she had not found the equivalent of what she had abandoned far away. No esteem, no sympathy, here, was worth those which had surrounded her there; not even the tenderness.

Julienne hid her face in her hands, driving back the tears, which she had at first allowed to flow without hindrance because they were sweet, but which now became bitter. No; her daughter's tenderness was not worth that of the orphans! Here was the cruel truth which she had refused to see, but which made itself evident in spite of her efforts.

"I will not think of it!" said the courageous woman to herself. "Aline is young, and all will change."

She went to her room, bathed her swollen eyes, smoothed her hair, and sought a favorite book to distract herself with. A ring at the bell made her shiver. Julienne was all alone in the apartment, her servant having leave of absence that day; and she went to open the door herself.

On the landing-place, in the obscurity of a Parisian stairway, there were two shadows: one feminine, quite

small, feeble, and shriveled up; the other masculine, of medium height, and well formed.

"Madame Breton?" said the feminine shadow, in an extremely sweet voice, with a delicious tone, so peculiar that Juliette experienced a shock from it.

"Madame Reynard!" she cried. "Ah, mon Dieu, how many years ago is it? Come in; come in quickly!"

The visitors obeyed; and, while the masculine shadow was shutting the door, Madame Reynard fell into the arms which Juliette stretched out to her.

"How did you recognize me?" she asked.

"By the voice; you have always had an unheard-of voice; it is like music. It is the very thing itself."

"I have brought you my son," said the visitor, "my son Albert; I have only this one. The other is lying under Metz."

"I know," said Juliette, quickly.—"You are very welcome, Monsieur Albert; you were very young the last time I saw you."

"I am twenty-six, madame," said the young man.

He had from his mother her exquisite charm of voice, although his was as deep as that of the little woman was feeble and thin.

When they were, all three, seated, they looked at each other with a smile, happy to be together.

"How many years, my good Madame Reynard," said Juliette, at last; "and how many sorrows!"

"Yes; widows, both of us—and of such husbands! We were very happy, dear madame; only it did not last long enough. The will of God be done!"

She sighed, and crossed her hands, one over the

other, with a resigned gesture, which spoke of many sufferings.

"I have kept my son," she resumed. "He is my only joy. And you—you still have Aline? How tall and handsome she must be!"

"She is tall; and really she is not bad looking," answered Julianne with a proud smile; "she will come in very soon, and you will see her. You are living in Paris, then, at present?"

"Why, yes! Albert has obtained a place as professor at Chaptal; that is very good at his age! It was his father's reputation that gained it for him, principally, for they could not judge of him; but he deserves it—I assure you that he deserves it, Madame Breton."

Julianne smiled, and looked at the young man. In fact, he had quite the look of deserving his place! His face, without being either handsome or regular, possessed a great charm; especially in his black eyes, not too large, but honest and lively, whose look sought and retained that of his interlocutor.

"He is quite like you, dear madame," she said to her old friend.

"So people say; I would have preferred that he should look like his father; but, such as he is, I find him well enough. Let me look at you, Madame Breton. But you are still pretty; and what a young look you have!"

Julianne blushed, which made her appear still younger. Madame Reynard continued: "As for me, I am broken—used up. I am also twenty years older than you, it must be confessed. Aline was the child of your youth; Albert is my last. But it is grief that wears one out!"

In a few words she told Julianne all that had happened during the long lapse of years which had rolled away since seeing her. Her husband had been principal of the provincial lyceum, where Louis Breton gave lessons, when he met her whom he had afterward married. The distance which separates a young professor from a principal, already mature, had prevented the two women from being intimately connected, notwithstanding the lively sympathy which drew them together. They had exchanged official visits, not daring to come closer for fear of gossips and jealousies, but every time they had met, away from home, they took an infinite pleasure in talking together. Louis Breton had gone to Versailles, and Monsieur and Madame Reynard had had no further direct communication with him beyond an exchange of New-Year's cards; but, on learning the premature death of the genial professor, Madame Reynard had sincerely wept over the lot of the poor young widow. She was going about, busying herself for her, in looking for patronage among her friends, perhaps to induce her to return to the province, near herself, when the news of Julianne's departure for Russia reached her. The following year, the principal had died; but Julianne had not received notice of it. Since then Madame Reynard had come to Paris, where her son had brilliantly entered into his university career. She had heard that a certain Madame Breton was opening a school for young girls; she had thought of Julianne—had assured herself that it was really she, and had come straight away to her.

All this was said simply, in a few words, with that delicious voice, weakened, but still melodious in its

tenuity. Julianne listened, touched by such a long perseverance in an affection which had had so few occasions to manifest itself.

"And now," concluded Madame Reynard, "I do not wish to lose sight of you again. For the few years that remain to me to live, I wish to draw around me dear and good people, that I may go contented when I leave to rejoin my husband."

Albert said nothing, but his gaze rested upon his mother with a confiding and pious tenderness.

"You love your mother?" said Julianne, almost in spite of herself. "She is very fortunate!"

"Yes, truly," answered Madame Reynard; "I am a fortunate mother. We will see each other very often now. We do not live very far from each other; we are in the Boulevard des Batignoles, on account of Chaptal, you understand; but there is an omnibus from the Jardin des Plantes."

"We will see each other as many times as you will kindly allow me," answered Julianne, smiling.

"O Madame Breton, we have no use for these formulas! There is no longer any 'principal' here, unfortunately! We are just two friends, too long separated, and we are going to try to make up for lost time. I am not very rich; you are more so than I—"

"Oh!" said Julianne, following her look around the parlor; "this is only the decoration of the classroom; I am far from being rich! I possess about seventy thousand francs; that does not give a very large income. I have a pension, it is true."

"We will not try to dazzle each other, then," said Madame Reynard; "our fortunes are nearly equal

and we ought to disdain the tinsel. When my son shall marry—”

A movement of Albert's indicated that, for the present, this thought was far from his mind. At the same instant the door opened, and Aline, who had come in with her key, appeared on the threshold.

“This is my daughter,” said Julienne.

The young man had risen, and was looking at Aline with unbounded admiration, as if he were dazzled by a work of art. In the waning daylight of the winter afternoon—tall, slender, with her shoulders confined by a close-fitting tippet, and her head surmounted by a small, dark, discreet bonnet—the young girl was really beautiful; the walk had given animation to her complexion, brilliancy to her eyes, and the surprise at finding guests whom she did not expect, had a little relaxed the constraint which she ordinarily exercised over herself.

The introductions were made, and then Aline passed into her chamber to take off her walking-wraps. During her short absence, Madame Reynard expressed her admiration to Julienne; Albert said nothing.

When she returned, her beautiful hair twisted around her well-modeled head; her eyes gay, for she was entertained, the smile of her severe mouth had an irresistible charm. She was looking her best and felt it, thanks to that special gift to certain women, who know exactly the effect they are producing at any given moment. She was pleased at it; a new admiration always gives pleasure, and the satisfaction which she experienced from it added still more to her grace. Madame Reynard was absolutely bewitched by the

charmer. When she went away, with an assurance that they should see her again soon, she had not the patience to get down-stairs before saying to her son : "That young girl is delicious ! What do you think of her, Albert ?"

"You have said the right word, mother. Delicious !" answered the young man in his deep, musical voice.

Madame Reynard looked at her son ; and immediately, in his mother's brain, there sketched itself the dream of a marriage, where it seemed all the elements of happiness ought to find themselves united.

"We will see them often, will we not ?" continued she.

"As much as you please, my dear mamma," replied Albert, docilely, without raising his eyes.

Madame Reynard took her son's arm and pressed it against her, without being aware of it, with more than ordinary tenderness.

A month had rolled away since this visit ; and they had seen each other several times with a very lively pleasure. Aline had been charmed at once by the delicate grace of the old woman ; this representative of an epoch, still very little removed, had however taken, in the eyes of the young girl, an especial charm, thanks to her white hair, which seemed to make her to recede very far into the past. Questioned on the probable age of Madame Reynard, Aline would not have known what to say ; she would willingly have believed her anterior to the Revolution, if her good sense had allowed her to do so ; and she thought of her as of a precious object belonging to a vanished period ; and she surrounded her with cares and kind

attentions, with an almost comic fright of damaging the fragile doll by touching it without precaution.

Albert Reynard, on the other hand, obtained from Aline only the degree of attention indispensable to politeness. This modest and silent young man did not inspire in her any curiosity ; she found him dull ; and, on questioning her a little, one would have made her pronounce the terrible word "provincial," which was, in the mouth of a naturalized Parisian, the highest expression of contempt.

It was perhaps true ; it was possible that the young Albert was "provincial," as Julianne herself was—that is to say frank, ready to admit what one said to him, not imagining that each one of those who talked to him had the intention of imposing upon him solely with a view of making fun of him afterward. This provincial being believed in the honesty of men and the virtue of women ; he was not skeptical ; he had the odd idea that one could shed tears without its being necessarily the result of an excessive nervous excitement ; he still thought that we are not traveling toward an irremediable decadence ; that evil is, in fact, as natural as good ; and that, consequently, one must have pity for it, instead of cursing it ; this son of a French mother, this brother of a soldier dead upon the field of honor, believed in the future of France.

There was some one in Paris who disdained Albert even more than Aline, and this was Léon Dorsay. The two men had met, eyed each other over, and judged on the spot.

"Not much !" had thought Dorsay.

"No great thing !" had said Reynard to himself.
And they had said nothing more to each other.

This annoyed Aline a little ; her admiration for her "little marquise," as she called Madame Reynard, involved a very large tolerance for her inseparable son ; and Léon Dorsay's coldness rendered their meetings difficult. The young girl's strategy was not yet very intricate, and she did not know how to set about maintaining an equilibrium with such doubtful forces. Suddenly she received, not from above, most certainly, an unexpected help.

Aline, notwithstanding her youth, went out alone ; her mother had recognized the impossibility of accompanying her, or of having her accompanied, in going to her classes and to the private lessons that she gave away from home. The young girl, besides, had a bearing which did not admit of mistakes. One day, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, as she was returning to their apartment, she encountered, at the turning of the street, Albert Reynard, who stopped short and blushed, like one of her own pupils caught in a fault. He saluted her very respectfully, and drew aside to let her pass. Their eyes met, and turned away again immediately ; urged by a strange curiosity, Aline turned around. He was in the same place, and was following her with his look.

"Stop ! he is in love with me !" said Mademoiselle Breton to herself, pursuing her route.

It is generally with a certain delight that one ascertains such a fact ; Aline was not troubled by it, but rather satisfied. The thing was not disagreeable in itself, and then (here the Machiavelism of the young lady spreads all its sails) one could make use of this incident to stir up Léon Dorsay a little, who decidedly did not show enough ardor.

A very slight insinuation sufficed, in fact, to light up a sort of jealousy in this personage. At bottom, if he had made Aline believe that he loved her, it was as much from policy against artifice of the young girl, as from cunning relative to Madame Dalibaud. This knowing manœuvre left him an entire liberty ; and Aline had really appeared to him only as a make-shift in case the charming Roberta decidedly refused to convert her government stocks into a workable capital. But when one is almost sure of having brought trouble into a young heart, and one considers this make-shift as absolutely certain in case of mishap, one does not see, without the liveliest displeasure, a pretender start up in one's face. Léon Dorsay, however, found it in vain to measure and remeasure Albert Reynard with his eye from head to foot ; the latter did not seem to trouble himself about it, nor even to take particular notice of Aline, whose every movement, nevertheless, made his heart beat.

Madame Dalibaud's notary was immovable. Roberta in vain proved to him by the most varied arguments that she was sole mistress of her fortune ; he turned a deaf ear.

"As a notary," said he, "my duty is to defend your interests against yourself ; as a relation (for we are first cousins once removed, my pretty friend), my duty is to dissuade you to the utmost from a measure which can only have the most disastrous results. You wish to convert your fortune ; I presume it is in order to marry again. Then let me tell you this : any man who does not find your money now as well invested as possible is not an honest man."

"My cousin!" exclaimed Roberta.

"Or else he is an idiot," concluded the notary, without being moved. "If he is only an idiot, it can still be managed; send him to me, and I will convince him. If he is not convinced, it is because he is a dishonest man, as I had the honor of telling you just now. And, if you are resolved upon it as much as that, you have one resource, my pretty cousin; send me a summons by the bailiff to restore to you the funds which your late husband confided to me, and which he bequeathed to you by a will which I drew up under his dictation. I will return your fortune to you if I am obliged to do so, but not otherwise."

How did Roberta convey this conversation to the handsome Léon? In what terms and by what circumlocutions? No one ever knew. The only fact which has transpired is this—Léon Dorsay ardently kissed his pretty friend's hands; the tenderness and the veneration which she had inspired in him were, he affirmed, far above any such questions, and nothing could modify the sentiments which he honored himself by feeling for her. But he did not demand of her to fix the time, near or not, for their marriage; and he left her without her knowing exactly what he had determined to do.

The same day, an hour before dinner, he presented himself at Madame Breton's and demanded of her the hand of Aline. He explained the state of his fortune, and insisted on a point of the highest importance.

"The situation that I occupy among my friends, who are, in a certain measure, my partners, does not permit me to act as I would have wished. Although I have never expressed my feelings to her, Mademoiselle

your daughter has too much penetration not to have divined that I love her distractedly. But my partners exact that my marriage shall complete the share of capital that I am engaged to contribute, and I see myself unfortunately constrained to think of the question of money, which is so far from my thoughts. Allow me, then, dear madame, to ask you to increase in my favor, as much as will be possible for you, the amount of marriage portion that you intend to give her. It will only be a fictitious dot, on which I will faithfully remit the interest at a very remunerative rate ; for I am master of my income, but I am obliged to pay in my capital. Turn over your capital, then, into my hands, and you will soon have an income which will double it, by the judicious use which I am in a position to make of it."

The poor Juliette had not understood a great deal of this discourse, except that Dorsay, in asking her for her daughter's hand, demanded at the same time as much money as she would give. She had the presence of mind to put him off to the following week, waiting to consult her daughter at leisure ; and he withdrew, very dignified, very charming—but in the blackest humor, for Madame Dalibaud had made him lose precious time while she squabbled with her notary, and Léon found himself in pressing need of money.

Aline received the news of this proceeding with a marvelous coolness, at which her mother was surprised, notwithstanding the habit with which she had begun to take such things.

"What did you answer?" asked the young girl.

"That I would consult you."

"Ah! very well! Then you can write to him that I accept."

"You accept!" said Julienne, upset; "a gentleman whom you hardly know, of whom we only know what he has said of himself; and he did not talk much about it!"

"I accept him," coldly repeated Aline.

"But why? You must have reasons."

"I have one, at the very least," replied the young girl, with a joking half-smile; "it is that Madame Dalibaud will have a fit of sickness from it."

Julienne let her arms fall, in the excess of her discouragement. "That is no reason at all, Aline," said she; "one does not marry for the sole pleasure of being disagreeable to one's neighbor; and Roberta, with all her faults and her little wrongs, has been very good to you; you have acknowledged it more than once. You have, then, some other motive for accepting the hand of this gentleman?"

Aline did not answer; the same ironical smile emphasized itself on her lips.

"I am your mother," resumed Julienne, with some vehemence, "and I ought to say to you what I think of the man who proposes to be your husband, and my son-in-law. He displeases me; I believe him to be selfish and interested. I have never heard him say a word that betrayed an elevated thought; his conduct toward Roberta is inexcusable, if it is you whom he loves. In short, I have for him neither esteem nor affection, and I do not believe that it will ever be possible for me to feel it for him. Under such circumstances, it seems to me that you ought to reserve your judgment and take time for reflection before answering."

Aline looked her mother full in the face, and said,

calmly : "Your reasoning has no effect, mamma. I love him."

"That is not true," cried Julienne, carried away by an irresistible feeling of rectitude. "You do not love him ! It is not thus that one loves ! All your worst feelings are excited by him ; vanity, spite, covetousness of the welfare of others, the pleasure of injuring ; all the meannesses, all the little dirty tricks—that is what this pretended love inspires in you ! No ; you do not love him ! You hate Roberta ; that is the truth."

"Not even that !" said Aline, all the more calm as her mother was the more agitated. "I do not hate her at all ! She amuses me !"

"You wicked girl !" said Julienne, with an accent of profound grief. "Wicked and without heart ! O Aline, what sorrow you cause me !"

"But, mamma," replied the pitiless child, "why be fanciful to such a degree ? You look at life from the wings of a hippogriff ; as for me, I look at it from behind a cab-horse : admit that one goes oftener in a cab than on a hippogriff !"

"Stop ! I am ashamed of you," said Julienne, leaving the room ; for she no longer felt mistress of herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIS conversation was renewed many times under different forms. Aline had adopted excellent tactics ; to wait until her mother opened the subject. As one could not avoid talking of it, as the days rolled by, the cunning young girl knew very well that Julienne would come back to it of herself ; and thus she remained on the defensive. Her mother could obtain from her nothing but this : " I love him ; and, since he demands me in marriage, I shall be happy to marry him."

" Let him take you without a marriage portion, then !" cried Julienne one day. " I am very sure then—"

" Mamma," said Aline, frigidly, her eyes hard, her lips suddenly become thin from anger, " you will not do this evil deed !"

" I ! an evil deed ! I should be astonished that my daughter could utter such a word, if I had not known for a long time that she does not know me !"

" Whose fault is that ?" replied Aline ; " if my mother had not abandoned me for six years—"

Julienne raised her hand to strike the insolent girl, but it fell back to her side, inert.

" Ingrate !" she murmured, feeling faint—" ingrate !"

Her feebleness was but momentary. She knew Aline's opinion about women who faint, and her self-esteem restored her energy.

"Leave me !" she said to her daughter. "We will resume this conversation in a different manner, when I shall be better shielded against outrages."

Aline left the parlor, with the outer appearance of a perfect calm, but in reality devoured by rage and a little also by remorse.

She did not quite render an account to herself of the motive which pushed her to such aggressions toward her mother; and yet, from the beginning of a conversation between them, Aline felt herself putting forth claws on all her fingers. Face to face with Julienne, she was in a state of permanent revolt; each word, each gesture of Madame Breton's irritated in her some secret fiber. The every-day life, with its thousand little rubs, exasperated her, as the rubbing of linen exasperates a sore; the small amount of patience which she had brought to it in the beginning was quickly used up; and the question newly raised between them was not of a nature to calm either the one or the other of them.

Aline did render an account to herself, however, in a certain measure, of her injustice and her ingratitude. More than once she had promised herself to be calm; not to attribute importance to trifles; to listen to her mother—not with deference; that idea not being suited to her mind—but with fairness. At the first word her good resolutions disappeared, the peevish disposition which she bore toward Julienne awoke more ardent than ever; and the interview, well begun, would finish badly, thanks to her—to her alone, as she felt only too much.

This time she did not ignore the crying injustice that she had committed in accusing Julianne with having abandoned her. All there was of honor and truth in Aline—and she had a good deal of them—revolted against this monstrous accusation ; and yet, in her rages, as a young girl repressed and rendered mute by her situation at Madame Dalibaud's, she had said to herself more than once, "My mother ought not to have left me"—forgetting that she had insisted upon her doing it !

A nature like that of Aline had much to suffer at her good friend's. Notwithstanding the tact and goodness (superficial, but always real) of the latter, on many occasions the little girl had felt that she was not at home ; the correction of her bearing and her manners had been imposed upon her by her immense pride, which could tolerate neither criticism nor reprimands. On escaping from this restraint, Aline had felt the need of more liberty to her mind and her words ; unfortunately, her species of mind and habit of words were calculated to shock Julianne, and hence the commencement of the animosity of the child against the mother—an unpardonable animosity, and yet, in a certain measure, explicable.

This time Aline felt herself to blame ; she would have given a great deal to recall her cruel expressions, but it was too late. Gifted with a more lively external sensibility, with more tenderness than self-love, another would have gone to throw herself on her mother's neck ; but Aline's instincts forbade her any such demonstrations. Discontented with herself, still more discontented with Madame Breton, whose consent (it was so simple !) would have put an end to the whole difficulty,

she kept silence, while waiting the resumption of hostilities.

Julienne felt a great need of support and consolation on coming out of such a painful scene; she had a mind to run to Monsieur Leroy, whom she had not yet had the time to go and see, and whom she did not wish to inform by letter of so important a circumstance; but there was not time to go so far as Nogent.

"Madame Reynard!" thought Julienne. "I will not tell her all; but, without her knowing anything, it will be enough for her to see me sad in order to find at once some good word!"

Madame Breton went rapidly toward the Boulevard des Batignolles. The weather was fine, and the passers-by walked with a cheerful step; insensibly the walk and the fine air modified her thoughts. Was she not wrong in being obstinately bent on struggling against Aline? And on the strength of what? Of an instinct, simply! Dorsay displeased her; that was not enough, in strict justice, to condemn him and execute him summarily; she ought, in equity, to get information, to inquire into his past and his present. How was it she had not done this, instead of becoming obstinate against Aline in such an afflicting struggle?

This thought took such a hold upon her that, turning back on her steps, she went into a post-office and sent a telegram to Monsieur Leroy, begging him to come and see her the next day. On coming out of the office she felt her conscience considerably lightened, and her mother's heart quite forgave her daughter the wrongs which she accused herself of having provoked.

Should she continue her route and go to see Madame Reynard, now? She was not very far from her friend's house, and she decided to go there.

The delicious little old woman was seated in a large easy-chair, which a whole world shared with her; her dog, easy and fat, made wise by age and very sensible to the attentions of visitors; great balls of yarn, which she used for knitting enormous coverlids, as soon recommenced as finished; some favorite books; the morning paper, while waiting for that of the evening; and some precious objects carefully covered from sight—her husband's portrait, that of her son—some dear letters recently received, such as one keeps at hand while waiting for another to come, in order to speak to you of absent friends with whom one wishes to remain in constant communication.

"It is pretty—my easy-chair, is it not?" said Madame Reynard, on perceiving Juliette. "It is a present from my son; he had a pocket made for it for my trifles." She tried to get up; but the dog, the balls of yarn, the papers, and the books began one of those successive falls which never finish.

"Remain sitting," said Juliette, picking up what had fallen under her hand; "when one is barricaded like that, one doesn't budge. Your easy-chair is magnificent!"

"Is it not? I will never get out of it again, that is settled! Let people come and talk to me of arm-chairs and lounges! My easy-chair!—Say, my good Juliette, do you know that I am delighted to see you? I have been thinking of you all the live-long day since—since Sunday; and, if you hadn't come, I would have gone to see you; but you know that Albert does

not allow me to go out alone, and really I have no need of him for what I am going to say to you. Sit here, close to me ; walls have ears, when they are lined with a maid-of-all-work."

Julienne felt her heart beat tumultuously in her breast ; was it possible that such a happiness was in reserve for her ?

"Your daughter is charming, my dear friend ; she is full of delicate attentions for me, which have touched my Albert. You know, one catches him through his mother ! He has fallen in love with Aline ; I have confessed him : he has absolutely forbidden me to tell it, therefore I have only thought of letting you know about it ; for what is the use of his being in love, if the object of his ardor is never to know about it ? And I confess I should be very glad to see him married. Life is so precarious ! One is alive to-day, and dead to-morrow. I know very well that this would separate me from him, but I love him enough to resign myself to it ; for I am not so simple, at my age, to believe that a mother can live with a young household ! Later, when they have children and do not know how to manage them, I do not say—and yet— ! But, for the first years, one ought to leave them to disentangle themselves. Albert has his salary, and something for private tuition ; he makes his six thousand francs a year ; with what I shall leave him, it is more than comfort. Aline can keep her classes. What do you say, my good woman ? For my part, it is all settled ; and I should be so glad of it !"

The excellent creature had taken Julienne's hands, and pressed them in a persuasive manner. When she stopped, Madame Breton caught her and embraced

her a long time. "Ah! my friend, what a beautiful dream! And how I wish it could be realized!"

"Well?"

"Unfortunately, I have received another offer."

"If it does not please you, that does not signify," said Madame Reynard, in an uneasy voice.

"Alas!" said Julianne, "I very much fear—"

She was silent. How say to this mother that her son had no chance of happiness?

"Let us see," resumed Madame Reynard, "this can not be very serious! Aline is so young! She can not have had time to become attached to any one. The offer you speak of is the first, no doubt; a young girl often accords some attention to the first offer, on account of the novelty; her self-esteem is flattered; but having the choice—"

"Ah! if it were me!" cried Madame Breton, half laughing, half in tears.

"I am sure of it, my dear friend, and I thank you for it!" said Madame Reynard. "Even so; but it is this little sly thing that holds the happiness of all of us in her hands. Let us see; is it decided, concluded? Are there no means of overcoming it?"

"Nothing is decided," answered Julianne, regaining her calmness; "he has asked for my daughter's hand; I have said that I would reflect about it; that is all. The suitor does not please me; he seems to please Aline; but that is not a decisive reason."

"Will you authorize my son to make his demand?"

"Oh, no!" cried Madame Breton, thinking with fright of the reception which this delicate and good being might receive from Aline, if she were in a wicked

humor. "Do not expose him to the cruelty of a refusal. It is so hard, these things!"

"It would be harder for him than for another," said Madame Reynard, gravely; "for he has put his whole heart, his whole life, in this hope. However, it is necessary that Aline should know—"

"She shall know it; I will tell her; but spare your son, my friend. If he is not accepted, I swear to you that it will not be my fault!"

"I believe you," said Madame Reynard, simply, offering her hand.

Julienne returned to Paris strangely preoccupied. The marriage which offered itself presented all the certainty of happiness; must she renounce a future for Aline so calm, so sure, surrounded by so much security?

"We will see what my godfather will say," thought she at last, as she entered her apartment.

On meeting her mother at table, Aline was quite astonished at the expression of her face. After the scene which had taken place, she expected to see her depressed and tired; Julienne's eyes, on the contrary, had a soft light in them, and her features seemed rested.

"Have you been to walk?" she asked, as much from curiosity as from the necessity of speaking, in presence of the servant who waited on them.

"I went to see Madame Reynard," answered Julienne, looking at her daughter.

The sweetness of this look disarmed Aline, already ready to rebel against the thought that her mother must have gone to complain of her to their friend.

"Is she well?" asked the young girl.

"Very well. She sent you her love."

Aline bowed her head, and felt something in her throat which troubled her, and to which she was not accustomed. So much sweetness, good for evil—this was not customary at all ! And yet it had its good side. She did not dare to raise her eyes for a moment, for fear of letting something fall which would have strangely humiliated her. When she was certain that this event would not occur, she spoke of her pupils, and the incident was closed. That evening, the mother and the daughter kissed each other, with a shadow of reserve on Aline's part, and each one went to sleep as best she could.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day, Leroy arrived, as calm as usual ; at sight of him, Aline withdrew to her chamber.

"It doesn't answer, then?" he said to Julienne. "What has happened?"

"Two offers of marriage," answered his god-daughter.

"Plague on it! And do you complain of that?"

"Ah! I am distressed! You can form no idea of my grief."

"Explain that to me," said the good old man, settling himself in an arm-chair.

He was soon made acquainted with the situation ; and after having reflected an instant, he said : "It is all quite clear : one of the two matches suits you, the other displeases you ; your daughter has chosen the one that you dislike ; it was to be expected !"

"But what remedy?"

"There is none."

"What! You do not think that by working on Aline, by taking her through her feelings, one might succeed in making her understand—"

♦ "Nothing at all ; she will not understand. She has a head made in that way. But you have a very simple means of getting rid of this Dorsay. Refuse to give a dot."

"Oh!" said Julianne, frightened.

"What is more simple? Your daughter loves this gentleman; if he loves her, he will marry her without a dot."

Julianne sadly shook her head. "He gave me to understand, in the clearest possible way," she said, "that the dot was the chief question. To tell the truth, his tone as a business man slurred over the heart of the question; but I am convinced that it is not Aline he wants, it is the money."

"All the more reason, then, for refusing!"

"But Aline would be mortally offended with me! Think of it, my godfather, she loves him, or at least she has got it into her head that she loves him; and if I refuse the essential condition of this marriage, she will believe that I am interested."

"Let her believe it! she will get over it."

"And mean time I shall die of mortification."

"It is not necessary to take things so tragically. Come, Julianne! Your daughter is a young lady well brought up—"

"Ah! I made a great mistake in leaving her!" sighed the poor mother. "If I had remained near her, I would not be now exposed to seeing her misunderstand me! All my life, as you know, I have worked only for her!"

"I know it; and, be easy—one day she will know it too. What astonishes me in all this," resumed Monsieur Leroy, after a short silence, "is that this gentleman should have had the idea of asking Aline's hand at all; he must think you have a large fortune?"

"I don't know what Roberta may have told him.

You know how one exaggerates everything in this world. It is certain, I can see, very well, that people generally suppose me much richer than I am. This apartment, which is really a bread-winner—”

“That is a part of your tools of trade; but evidently, when one thinks of it, it might deceive one. Let us see, how much do you possess altogether?”

“Seventy thousand francs,” answered Juliette.

“Was it worth while that you should economize, and that I should make good investments for you simply to confide such a fine sum of money to such a rascally fellow? I have scarcely seen him, but I can not endure him. I have an idea that this marriage will not take place, in spite of everything. Listen; let us try the chance. Will you let me talk with your daughter? I will tell her that you consent to her marrying Monsieur Dorsay; but that you can not give him any dot. You only agree to furnish her a pretty trousseau.”

“My friend, my dear godfather, have you thought of the consequences which that might bring about?”

“Consequences? I see only favorable ones.”

“But Aline’s anger—”

“I must stop you just here, my dear goddaughter. Aline’s anger? Very well, it is an anger like any other; I shall not be sorry to see how it works; that will teach me something. Call your daughter.”

Pale and discomposed, Juliette went to look for Aline, who was reading, or pretending to read, in her chamber. When they were all three seated, Leroy drew forth his snuff-box, took a pinch, shook off the particles which had fallen on his coat with much grace, and commenced his discourse.

“Your mother has informed me, my dear child, of

the demand which Monsieur Dorsay has made for your hand. You are disposed, she tells me, to accord your consent; she does not refuse hers" (here Aline looked at him with astonishment); "but, after having taken my advice—it seems that we have the same idea—she has resolved to attach to your marriage the absolute condition that she shall not give you any dot. You will have, however, a very pretty trousseau; to which I will subscribe two thousand francs and a fan."

Without waiting until he had finished, the young girl had risen and looked at him with flashing eyes. Monsieur Leroy had expressed the desire to be acquainted with Aline's anger. He believed that he was going to be satisfied.

"No dot?" she said, in a trembling voice; "and you consent that I shall marry a rich man without a dot? You have very little pride, you two!"

Without adding a word, she started for the door.

"Aline!" cried her mother, "listen!"

She closed the door, without seeming to have heard. The two friends looked at each other.

"We are not much more advanced than before," said Monsieur Leroy, coolly. He started to draw out his snuff-box again, but he thought better of it. "We shall not get through with this to-day, evidently," he continued. "She is clever! I did hope that she was going to eat me up; that would have given me a fine part to play. We must stick to it, and stick firmly. Above all, Julianne, do not yield. Be firm as a rock; the least concession will lose all. On my side I will go and get information about my lord Dorsay, and I hope it may be bad. I know a little agency where they strip people for you. Oh! it is not dear! For a

hundred sous, you have approximate information ; but if you give twenty francs— Of course, it is only from a commercial point of view ; for, you understand, if it were about one's private life, that would be much more dear."

He smiled craftily, and kissed his goddaughter's forehead.

"If Aline should speak to me about it?" said the latter, discouraged.

"Let her talk ; don't answer. You saw, just now, how that succeeded with her ; do the same."

He went away, leaving Julianne in a profound depression.

The school must not suffer from these internal dissensions ; the poor woman, on hearing the bell, must resume her coolness with an official bearing. It was, at first, a terrible effort for her to answer the mammas, to talk to the little girls, to recall the thousand details relative to the previous week—the previous week ! There must have rolled away whole years since yesterday, of which Julianne would have better lost the memory.

She resumed her self-possession, however ; and, once returned to the routine of her school, she felt a sensible improvement. Through the partition, in a side-room, she heard Aline, who was also giving her lesson ; at intervals, her grave voice explained the mysteries of syntax. All this was so natural, so sweetly familiar, that Julianne asked herself for an instant if she had not been dreaming.

The lessons ceased, the children left the house one after the other ; in the antechamber Aline and her mother met, while showing the ladies out. Julianne

was the first to return to the parlor, and set herself feverishly to arranging the books of the class. Aline came in, shut the door, and went straight to Madame Breton.

"Mother," said she, "you did not deign to inform me, yourself, of your resolution ; I would have preferred to see the question remain between ourselves. You have charged your godfather to announce to me that you refuse to give me a dot. I thought, however—you have told and written it to me many times—that your sole motive, in leaving me for six years in strange hands, was the wish to lay up a sum which would allow me to marry honorably, and thus to assure my future welfare. It seems that such were not your intentions, or at least that you have changed your mind. I am sorry for you."

"Aline !" said Julianne, more afflicted than irritated by this strange harangue.

"I had thought that on seeing me sought by a man, distinguished, rich, and belonging to the best society, you would have been flattered, and that you would exert yourself to contribute to my happiness. It is an exceptional situation, that of Léon Dorsay's wife."

"What do you know about it ?" interrupted Julianne.

"Everybody knows that !" scornfully replied Aline. "His name is in the newspapers."

"That is not a sufficient reason."

"Very well ; here is another. I know half a dozen mothers any one of whom would ask nothing better than to give him her daughter !"

Aline deceived herself ; she might have said with

more exactness that half a dozen young girls would have asked nothing better than to become Madame Dorsay ; but she was not in a humor to look at it so closely.

"I believed," she continued, "that you would have been proud to see me preferred to all the world ; but, for some reason or another, you see fit to thwart my wishes. Naturally, you are mistress to do as you please. It was just the same with painting : I had a wish to become an artist, and you imposed upon me this career of a teacher, which I detest, and from which I will escape at any cost !"

"My daughter !" said Julienne, wounded.

"Yes, at any cost ! And, look here ; I have finished a small painting, and I wish to send it to the *Salon*—you are going to refuse me permission for that also, I suppose ? Systematically you oppose every thing I wish for ! Anyhow, this will not last forever !"

"What do you mean ?" said Julienne, frightened out of her senses.

"When I am twenty-one, I shall choose a career ! In the mean time, I do not wish to live at your expense. I am going to look for a place as teacher or companion."

"My child !" begged Madame Breton. "Listen, I pray you !"

"I have listened to it all, mamma," replied Aline, quitting the solemn tone which bored her. "Will you, or will you not, give me a proper dot ?"

"In the present case it would not be reasonable !" groaned Julienne.

"Then I shall find a place. Do you wish to know what I think, my dear mother ? You have never loved

me ! On my father's death you put me in a boarding-school. By good luck, that did not last long. You then seized the first occasion to go to Russia, as far away as possible. Ah, there you were well rid of me ! You attached yourself to strange children to the extent of forgetting to love your own daughter ! ”

“Aline ! ” said Julienne, in a low voice, feeling both voice and strength to fail her.

“When you returned,” continued the pitiless young girl, “after nearly four years, you did not even give me the few days you had promised me ! You departed immediately, and for three more long years I had to submit to the impertinences of your friend, who was jealous of my youth. Yes, that is the way it was ! A fine marriage offers itself—a marriage that suits me—and you are obstinately bent on making it fail, either from prejudice or avarice, for I really do not know which of the two it is. No, mother, you have never loved me ; and it is for that reason that I wish to rid you of my presence.”

She spoke in a calm tone, and one could have believed in her coolness if the fire in her eyes and cheeks had not given the lie to her apparent tranquillity. This time Aline was in a rage.

Julienne had listened to it all in such a profound despair that she could not find strength to answer ; the cruel words, falling on her heart, tormented her with their repeated blows. Under the violence of injustice, she recovered her energy.

“My daughter,” said she, “during the lifetime of your father I divided my heart between you two ; since his death, you have been my only thought. My life has been but one long sacrifice ; I could prove it to

you by evidence, but I do not care to lower myself to that. My entire existence speaks sufficiently in my favor. I refuse you a dot for the present, because I wish to reserve my resources for the future; and, in acting thus, I give you a new proof of tenderness—”

“It seems so,” said Aline, ironically.

“Yes, of tenderness! You have confidence in Monsieur Dorsay? Well, I do not believe in his disinterestedness.”

“Oh! indeed!”

“I do not believe in it,” repeated Julianne, firmly. “From the way in which he spoke to me, I understood that he considered money as the essential condition.”

“Naturally,” replied Aline. “I have heard him more than once speak of his business; he must bring to the house where he works a capital, a security, a sum of money, in a word. With his position he might pretend to a large fortune; and in choosing me, who am not rich, he gives the most touching proof of his disinterestedness! And this is the man whom you wish me to marry with empty hands!”

“I might give you the income from your dot,” said Julianne, shaken.

“The income! A fine business! It is the capital that he needs, to make it valuable! Do you suppose that a man of business is satisfied with an income of four per cent?”

“I can not offer you more,” said Madame Breton.

“Monsieur Leroy has advised you badly, mamma! That is all I can say to you! Let it be so; you shatter my life; I accept your decision. I will try to create

for myself new family relations among strangers somewhere."

"Aline sit down," said her mother with authority; "I have something to say to you."

Surprised by this change of tone, the young girl obeyed.

"Monsieur Dorsay demanded your hand of me on the day before yesterday; but since then, I have received another proposal for you. I must inform you of it, however much it may cost me, under such circumstances, to betray the secrets of a worthy man, who has extremely tender feelings. Madame Reynard has told me that her son wishes to marry you."

A transient flash of triumph passed over Aline's face, without its losing its expression of hardness.

"I charge you to reflect," resumed Julianne, "to weigh justly these two proposals, before irretrievably casting aside the one whose acceptance would overwhelm me with joy. Albert Reynard does not demand a dot; his work and yours will make an honorable existence for you; and later on, his mother and yours will leave you what they have laid up—"

Aline got up without waiting for the end of the phrase. "I will not have it, with your little school-master! He bores me; I execrate him, the little pedagogue! To continue giving lessons, is it? To run about giving private instruction, to hold classes; and then, on Sunday evening a little family *bélique*? Ah! no, indeed! That is not the life I have dreamed about! I want dresses, I want society; I want high life, in a word! What! I have the unheard-of good luck to be possessed of sufficient beauty to be demanded by a rich man, and you would condemn me to

the suffocation of a poor existence as a professor's wife? No, mamma; that idea, don't you see, may as well be given up for lost!"

"It is, then, Monsieur Dorsay's fortune that you are in love with?" asked Julienne, sorrowfully.

"His fortune and himself! The two go together! I like the position he will give me, and I like to be loved enough for him to wish to associate me with his wealth. You are losing your time, mother. For two years and a half to come, you can prevent my marrying according to my own ideas; but you can not compel me to marry according to yours!"

"For two years and a half?" repeated Julienne, upset.

"Yes! After that I can serve a summons on you."

"Oh!" said the unhappy mother, struck full in the heart. "But," resumed she with vehemence, "do you believe, then, that he will wait for you two years and a half—this man who has need of ready money?"

Aline hesitated a moment; then, in an access of violent sincerity, she said: "No; I do not believe it. He could not! And I shall have spoiled my life! Stop, mamma; do you want to hear what I have to say to you? If you insist so much on keeping your money, it must be to do like Madame Dalibaud—that is, to marry again!"

"I refused to do it, not a year ago," answered Julienne, looking her straight in the eyes; "and I refused a man many times a millionaire, a man whom I esteem, and for whom I had a great friendship. And I refused him in order to devote myself entirely to you, my daughter."

Aline received the blow without flinching; the

state of mind she was in, like a moral anæsthetic, prevented her from feeling her hurts.

"You made a great mistake," she answered. "But this is no reason why you should not wish to marry somebody else now."

"Aline!" cried Julianne, putting her hands to her ears, that she might hear no more—"Aline, I will pardon you everything but that, if you say it again. Take my money, you unfortunate child, take everything! I no longer exact but one thing; that your husband shall be honorable! I release him from all the rest—and you too. Leave me, leave me!"

In a sudden expansion, Aline felt her fury to die out, and she drew near her mother, to take her in her arms, in order to repair a little, at least, of the evil she had done; but Julianne, worn out with the struggle, was not in a condition to observe the change. She retired to her chamber, turning away her head with a last gesture, which was an order to leave her alone.

CHAPTER XV.

As often happens in such a case, Aline remained very much embarrassed by her victory. In spite of her immense pride, in spite of her prodigious obstinacy, and of all the gaps in her moral sense, she felt very keenly that she had acted badly and spoken still worse. To wait until the next day to see her mother seemed very hard to her ; and she had heard Julienne give the order to bring her some soup only in her chamber, instead of dinner.

The young girl sought about her for some one whom she could go and see under the circumstances ; not to pour herself out, for that was a need that she scarcely knew, but to distract herself, and to change the current of her thoughts. Obstinate her mind presented to her Madame Reynard ; the sweet, soothing, strengthening Madame Reynard. Why must that booby of an Albert come and put himself in the way of such a delightful friendship !

With much internal ill-humor against Albert Reynard, Aline seated herself at table, and ate almost nothing ; and immediately afterward went to her chamber, possessed with the blackest melancholy.

Great expenditures of energy leave behind them a weakness as real as great hæmorrhages ; it seems as if it might be as dangerous to waste the forces of the

soul as to let those of the body escape. Aline felt herself depressed ; and a serious discontent with herself added itself to this painful feeling. An expression of her mother's had buried itself, like a nail, in her brain. "Do you believe, then, that he will wait for you?"

She knew very well that he would not wait. Aline, infatuated as she was by the elegant person and the brilliant position of Léon Dorsay, acknowledged to a certain degree his moral barrenness. In her plan for the future, the young girl had never looked for the long tenderness of Philemon and Baucis ; she had foreseen a future, quite near even, where she would be the beautiful Madame Dorsay, well dressed and entertained ; where she and her husband, going in a carriage together to some ball, would not say a word all the way ; he, absorbed in his business ; and she, pre-occupied with her worldly duties and pleasures. This future did not frighten her ; she found it quite natural. Old age at the end ? Bah ! with money, one could always have a full house !

But this future, which she had so tranquilly faced more than once, appeared to her now of a frightful sadness. In vain she tried to shake it off. Had not her mother ended by consenting to her marriage ? The next day Madame Breton would, without doubt, have made up her mind and would be resigned ; Aline would marry Dorsay, and would bring the sum laid up by Juliette during six years of exile. Why was she not more satisfied ? There was, deep down in herself, among these mysterious answers, where we sometimes do not dare to descend, a bitter doubt. Juliette had never lied, and her daughter knew it,

and on this point rendered her justice. And she had said, after yesterday's conversation, that Dorsay was not disinterested. This idea, which had so strongly incensed Aline, was hidden at the very bottom of her soul; and in spite of herself, ten times an hour, she asked herself vaguely, without daring to formulate a precise question, "Is he really disinterested?"

Did she know him, this brilliant and enigmatical being? What did she know about him? Almost nothing; and that little was not to his credit. He had at first visibly sought Madame Dalibaud; then he had given the young girl to understand that his visits were for her. Had she not suffered from this double game? Suffered in her self-esteem, almost in her dignity; for her heart entered for nothing in these proud hopes. Even two days before this, if any one had come to say to her, "Léon Dorsay is going to marry Madame Dalibaud"—or anybody else—would she have been very much astonished at it?

All these reflections assailed Aline, in turn or together, like the tumultuous maddened waves against the hull of a ship, not clear and distinct, as they are set forth here, but vague and without definite outline, causing her a distress more and more sharp, and soon intolerable.

For the first time, since very long ago, the young girl felt the tears come into her throat; she succumbed under the weight of an immeasurable grief; and, in her turn, as formerly with her mother, she hid her head under the bedclothes to stifle her sobs. She could not define the exact cause of her grief; but life, altogether, suddenly seemed to her like a fountain of bitterness; there was no longer, in the mind of

Aline, one single joy which was not poisoned by she knew not what sadness. This painfully gained consent no longer had the effect of a triumph; the dot obtained, no longer inspired her but with disgust; the anticipated future was deprived of all joy; and Dorsay himself only appeared in her thoughts accompanied by cruel doubts. On the realization of her wishes, she found herself more unhappy than she had been before. What, then, could she wish for? That her mother had consented with a good grace; that no bitter word had come to trouble the quietude of her heart; that her dream of fortune—and might she say of love—had realized itself without difficulties; so that she might not be forced to reflect?

The night seemed short, although she had not closed her eyes; but one knows with what feverish haste the hours pass when the overexcited mind is at work! She waited until her mother had appeared in the dining-room before entering; and only when she heard the click of the breakfast things did she venture to show herself.

How she was changed, this mother, often accused of indifference! One night had sufficed to make of her face, still young and fresh, that of an old woman, wrinkled, faded, with eyes deeply shaded in their sockets, with many threads of silver shining in her brown locks—those “provincial” locks, so often laughed at by Aline—and which gave to her face so calm and noble an expression.

“Mamma!” murmured Aline, letting her hands fall before her disheartened, and feeling in her heart overcome with a storm of remorse.

“Good-morning, my child,” said Julienne, kissing

her forehead with a grave air. "Will you have one, or two, lumps of sugar in your glass of milk?"

The young girl understood that her mother had fortified herself against the contingency of a new attack, and she experienced a profound grief at it. Her mother—to take such precautions! This was no longer *Julienne*! Was it possible that the wound, of which her countenance bore visible traces, had changed her heart as profoundly? *Aline* felt it; until now, in accusing her mother of not loving her, she had given way to a sentiment of spite; but this time, indeed, *Julienne* had perhaps withdrawn her love from her; and she remained crushed before the greatness of the evil she had done.

Could she undo it? For the duration of a flash of lightning she thought so; but the sole means of restoring happiness to this crucified mother was to renounce becoming the wife of *Léon Dorsay*.

Aline was stupefied on seeing that she had admitted this contingency; the day before she would not have endured even the suspicion of it. What had happened within herself, that her whole being should be so changed? A puff of pride drove away the good thought; renounce a triumph obtained at the price of such combats? That would be absurd! If the thing were to be done over again, perhaps—probably she would not act in the same way; but now, the lot was cast, and she would follow her destiny.

Monsieur Leroy made a short visit in the afternoon. He had taken information with regard to *Léon Dorsay*. There was nothing to allege against him; he lived too sumptuously and he did too much business—nobody knew with whose money; but no complaint

had ever been raised against him, and he paid his rent punctually.

"He is still an honest man, or reputed to be ; but I wouldn't trust him to take care of my dog. And you, Julienne, are going to give him your daughter and your money ?"

"My old friend," said Madame Breton, resolutely, "if I had to undergo afresh all that I have borne in the last twenty-four hours, I should lose either my life or my reason."

"In that case, do as you please," said Monsieur Leroy, kissing her affectionately. "You know you have an old godfather who will never let you die of hunger. At the worst, you can come and live with me ; I am seventy-seven years old, so I suppose that would not cause any gossip !"

"Thank you, godfather ; and then I have my life-pension."

Julienne had such an exhausted look, her whole person bore so visibly the marks of the frightful torture recently undergone, that Monsieur Leroy did not insist.

"I do not wish to see your daughter," he said ; "I should say something irritating to her. And I had hoped to sign as a witness to her marriage ! Monsieur Dorsay will excuse my signature, and also, I believe, my presence, on which he will scarcely insist. Good-by, my little child ; come to see me often ; that will be a consolation."

Hardly had Monsieur Leroy gone, when Julienne went to her daughter, who was working busily in the parlor.

"I am going to write to Monsieur Dorsay that he

can present himself here ; only, Aline, I beg of you to announce to him, yourself, that I consent. It would be too painful for me to have to play a part for which I have no disposition. I will do whatever is necessary, but don't ask more of me."

Aline listened with her head lowered ; two or three times she came near interrupting her mother, to say to her, "It is useless—I no longer wish it," but her pride stopped her.

"I possess, as my whole fortune, seventy thousand francs ; I give them to you, and I will then not be worth a penny. But I have always my life-pension."

Seventy thousand francs only ! Aline had imagined her mother richer—at least double of this. Julienne, guessing her thought, explained to her in a few words how, leaving without resources and even with some small debts, she had been able to pay everything, to support herself, to send regularly the tuition for her daughter, and to put aside the greater part of her salary. The gratuity which she had received on leaving the Lébédéf family had completed the actual sum.

So little ! Aline's hopes saw themselves clipping their wings ; she was ashamed to announce so mean a figure to the brilliant man of business ; and at the same time, while her mother was talking, she considered the patient saving, the wise economy, which had allowed the income to accumulate, to grow into this little capital ; she understood why her mother held on to her gowns so long, and why she carried so much simplicity into her personal linen, which she and her daughter alone would see.

"My dear mamma," commenced Aline, "I thank you."

"Do not thank me," said Julienne, with her grave sweetness; "it would be too painful to me to hear you thank me for the money."

"Ah, mamma!" cried the young girl, this time trampling her conquered pride under foot; "it is not for the money; it is for the courage and patience; it is for the exile; it is for the griefs which it represents."

Julienne dropped her lids over her eyes, hot with tears. Had she at last understood this ungrateful child? But the mother's soul was too deeply hurt not to fear false hopes; she kept silence a moment, and then said: "I am very glad that you have taken notice of what it represents. That will doubtless explain to you why I wished to hand over my savings into sure hands. It seems that Monsieur Dorsay's reputation has received no stain. Act, then, according to your wishes, my daughter."

Repentant and grieved, Aline went to her mother, took her in her arms, and kissed her tenderly over and over again. Julienne returned her caresses, but without warmth. She had driven back her tears; never, no never again, should her daughter have to repeat to her that famous "Be reasonable, then!" which had branded her like a red-hot iron.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next day, in the afternoon, Dorsay presented himself at Madame Breton's. As her mother had requested, Aline received him.

"Dear mademoiselle," said he, approaching her, "madame, your mother, has made known her decision to me; you can believe that I am very happy at it."

For the first time in more than a year, Aline perceived that the young man's words and tone of voice were not in accord with the expression of his eyes, which were at this moment uneasy and shifting.

"Sit down, monsieur," said she, pointing to a chair at a certain distance. "I have something to communicate to you. My mother told me yesterday the amount of my dot."

"Dear child," began Dorsay, "these questions ought not to come near you; it is madame, your mother—"

"Pardon me; my mother has entirely stripped herself for me; in a word, she no longer possesses anything; it is therefore I who, according to your desire, will hand over my fortune into your hands."

Dorsay made a gesture which indicated all the indifference which he brought to such questions.

"This fortune is a great deal for us, a great deal for my mother, who has laid it up by an infinity of sacrifices ; but it is very little for you—"

"I beg of you—" said the accepted lover, with an accent of entreaty, which sounded false to the young girl's ears—

"In short, my dot amounts to seventy thousand francs, in good investments. That is all, monsieur, that I wished to say to you."

Dorsay's countenance was discomposed. Into what a scrape had he got himself ! He had been told that this little girl was rich ; he had been led to believe that the mother, going away poor, had returned with considerable wealth. He had never inquired into the source of this money ; it mattered little to him, provided he was sure of its existence ; and, behold, this fortune was reduced to nothing.

Aline watched him attentively ; he felt the necessity of saying something.

"It is you whom I love, and not your fortune," said he, gallantly, taking the young girl's hand to carry it to his lips.

She received this official kiss with a sort of repugnance ; those lips lied, she was sure of it now. Since coming in Dorsay had not said a word, had not made a gesture, which could inspire confidence. She withdrew her hand, and resumed :

"I have still something to say to you, monsieur. We are in the full academic year, and I can not abandon my mother in the midst of her labors, since my presence is altogether indispensable to her. Our marriage, if it takes place (she could not refrain from adding this reservation), can not, therefore, come off

before the first days of July—that is to say, in about four months.”

“So late?” said Dorsay, pretending to look blue; “you can’t think of such a thing, dear child! My business—”

“You have your business, and I have mine, Monsieur Dorsay,” replied Aline, with a secret irritation; “I can not do otherwise. It is for you to see if that suits you.”

She looked at him with an almost threatening air. Little disposed to have a premature explanation, Dorsay resigned himself to putting a good face on a bad game.

“It always suits me to obey you,” said he, with a protecting smile. “Only I cried out about it, because I find the delay very long for my impatience. You know very well that I have loved you for a long time.”

“I love you!” This was the second time he had said it to her, but Aline was not moved the least in the world. In the midst of the whirlwind created in her thoughts by the scene of the night before, one idea had floated uppermost—“He has preferred me to Madame Dalibaud.” This idea, first germ of that of marriage, had foundered all at once in a furious eddy. No; he had not preferred her; it was Roberta who—one does not know for what reason—had no longer wished for him, without doubt. Had he told the lovely woman that he loved her? It was not impossible. When had he lied? Both times, probably.

Nothing gives way like a love of the head, and nothing is more like hate than the feeling which follows it. The shame of being deceived, of having been deceived, rather; the humiliation of not having perceived

it sooner ; the need of regaining, as soon as possible, all that one has given of one's self, even without the knowledge of him whom one has loved ; all this soon creates a great rage, often accompanied with intense disgust, when the fallen idol is drowned in the mud of his feet of clay. Prepared unwittingly by her doleful vigil, Aline suddenly felt a violent desire to say to Dorsay : "Go away ! What are you doing here ?"

He understood it ; for he was intelligent. He felt that he had sunk irredeemably in the mind of the young girl, and a blush mounted to his forehead. He was a man broken by the struggles of life ; and he had, in difficult moments, looked honest men in the face, whose eyes did not express any esteem ; but he had never seen a maidenly look rest upon him with that expression.

"I am very happy—very happy," he repeated, getting up. "I will have the honor of seeing madame, your mother. Can she not receive me ?"

"My mother is ill," said Aline, without taking her eyes off him.

"I am very sorry !" said Dorsay, resuming his fine self-possession. "Will you please tell her, my dear child, all my gratitude for the double sacrifice which she is willing to make in my favor ?"

Aline's eyes questioned him ; she had not understood.

"Yes, double ; her daughter first, and her fortune. Say to her, I beg of you, that I will try to deserve her tenderness."

He stopped short. That clear look, resting upon him, embarrassed him to the extent of mixing his ideas.

"Au revoir," he said. "Au revoir, my dear betrothed."

She turned away her eyes, and became pale. His betrothed! She had had the idea of marrying this man! What miracle had saved her? The word he had just pronounced gave her a shiver.

He took her hand—she let him do it; he kissed it, and she had the courage not to show that she resented it. He went out; and then she took her handkerchief and rubbed the soiled hand violently, passionately. The outer door closed; she ran to Julianne's chamber, rushed in like a gust of wind, and, throwing herself on her knees before this unappreciated mother, cried out to her, in tears: "Pardon, mamma, pardon! It is all over; I no longer wish it! I will not marry him! Mamma, kiss me!"

Julianne, confused, began by having great fear. With her arms wound about her daughter, she asked her questions. What had he said, that she should have changed her mind so quickly?

"He has said nothing in particular; but, altogether, he was nothing but a lie and a cheat; and to think that I had not perceived it, and that I might have had the misfortune to be his wife! O mamma, can you ever forgive me?"

CHAPTER XVII.

To arrange a marriage is not always so easy ; but to break one off sometimes becomes very difficult. This is what Julianne said to herself before Leroy's arrival, whom she had summoned by telegraph. The brave old man had no sooner entered than the situation seemed suddenly to become clear, so much good-will, understanding, and prompt decision did he bring with him.

"Withdraw your promise, my dear Julianne? Nothing easier; I will attend to that. To-morrow morning, I will go to this gentleman, and I will reclaim your letter; he will not care to keep it—I fear only for your self-esteem. Is there nothing else to reclaim from him while I am about it?"

He questioned Aline with a look; she colored with indignation: all her combative faculties, which had been benumbed since the day before, only demanded to be reawakened.

"Can you suppose," she cried, with bitterness, "that I could have forgotten what was due to myself so far as to write to Monsieur Dorsay? Ah! indeed, I did not think to have deserved that, monsieur!"

"Call me grandfather," quietly said the wise old man; "and do not put yourself in a rage with me, because that doesn't frighten me at all. You have ar-

ranged your little affairs so well ! I might suppose, without offense, that you have had news from your suitor, which you have not communicated to us. There are none ? You can not imagine how delighted I am ! It will be much easier for me to make him give up the letter of a respectable woman like Madame Breton than the love-letters of an imprudent girl of nineteen."

Aline was not soothed ; her irritation sought some object on which to expend itself, and the quiet person of Monsieur Leroy suited her exactly for that ; she shot an indignant glance at him, wished to speak and said nothing, but her attitude spoke for her.

The old friend of the family left the parlor without her having pronounced a word.

"Godfather, don't you think you have been a little hard ? " said the good Julianne, quite low, while seeing him to the door.

"Not half as much as she deserves," replied the old man, in a firm tone. "As for you, you forgive at once—it is already forgiven ! But, for my part, I will not forgive her so quickly for the evil she has done. When you look at yourself in the glass—"

"Oh !" said she, smiling, "a few white hairs, more or less—a fine affair !"

"Very well ; a few little lessons, more or less—more, I should say—will do a great deal of good to your daughter ; and as you will not give them to her, I must do so myself. But I will not bear too hard, deserved as it would be. Until to-morrow ! I will bring you back liberty, and don't let it trouble you ; the man is not worth the bother."

He came back the next day, annoyed enough. At

Dorsay's, a well-trained *valet-de-chambre* told him that his master had gone to the country for three days.

"And it is perfectly true," added the keen old man. "While that lanky fellow was talking to me, I cast a glance behind him; the dining-room was not laid out, the master had not slept at home; it is as clear as the day."

"What is to be done?" asked Julianne.

"Wait. There is no danger in the delay. I will return there on Saturday. And do you want some advice? Your daughter has made a little daub, which she wishes to send to the *Salon*. Let her do it."

Madame Breton looked at him, uncertain.

"Let her do it," repeated the wicked old man. "If it is received, that will give her pleasure; if it is refused, that will do her good."

"Let it be so," answered Julianne.

That very evening she spoke of it to Aline, who accepted the proposition without much exultation; and the next day the little picture departed for the unknown.

Nothing special marked the following two days, which weighed heavily enough on Julianne and her daughter. They were full of tenderness for each other. Aline sought, in a manifest way, to render herself agreeable to her mother; but her pride was too deeply hurt not to cause her smarting pains.

On Saturday there was no school in the Rue Lafayette, and it was Madame Breton's reception-day.

Leroy had promised to come as soon as he should have finished his proceedings; but the greater part of the afternoon had passed without his appearance, and Julianne began to feel uneasy, when Madame Dalibaud

presented herself, looking very pretty and very young, under a little bonnet decked with full-blown roses.

They had scarcely seen her for two or three months ; a sort of reciprocal restraint presided over the relations of the two old friends, and took away their charm of former times ; so that Julianne was quite astonished at the ease, and still more at the real affection, with which Roberta planted a kiss on each cheek.

"Imagine, my dear," said she, installing herself in an arm-chair ; "I have some news—no, two pieces of news, to tell you ; but only one of them is very interesting.—You here also, little one ? Come and kiss me !" she said to Aline, who came in and who obeyed with a sufficiently bad grace. "Isn't she pretty, the little sly-boots ! She grows prettier every day !—Come, sit down, and listen to my news. Don't cry out, I beg of you ! In the first place it wouldn't be polite, and then it would disturb the current of my ideas. Are you sufficiently prepared ? Very well, I am going to marry again !"

Neither Julianne nor Aline could take upon herself to show the least astonishment, which somewhat disconcerted the charming Roberta ; nevertheless, attributing this calm to a too strict observance of her request, she resumed her speech.

"Yes, I am going to marry again. Ever since you took your daughter away from me, my good Julianne, the house has seemed to me so empty, so sad ! Do you know, it was a real sacrifice that I made to you, in giving her up !"

Aline looked at her mother with an angry air. Madame Breton smiled quietly, shaking her head with little nods, with an appearance so satisfied, that her

daughter could not make out whether it was irony or complacency.

"After all, one must know how to sacrifice one's self for those whom one loves," continued Madame Dalibaud, with an absolutely convinced air. "But I was very lonely, and solitude is a bad counselor. My notary had told me to hold on to my investments, which are of the first quality."

Here the amiable woman bit her lips. Was it at the remembrance of an ungrateful fellow, or to keep herself from an imprudence? She went on none the less: "I couldn't amuse myself by speculating, like so many others, who thus make for themselves a life full of excitement; and then I don't like excitement, I like animation, which is not at all the same thing! Then I looked about me—and I found my dream! My dream I tell you! Two loves of children! A little boy and a little girl! Three and four years old. They wear little short, short dresses, and great long, long pelisses, with enormous hats! Between them they take up the whole sidewalk in the narrow streets, the Rue Vivienne, for example. It was there that I met them, with their grandpapa, and I said to myself: "Here is what I want! I must have those children, and then I shall no longer feel any void about me! That occupies one—babies of that age!"

Julienne kept on smiling; Aline felt herself seized with a desire to laugh, more and more intense, which she repressed as best she could.

"These little ones have an adorable mother—twenty-two years old! She married too young, in fact; that is not good sense! She occupies herself with them, and even a good deal; but you can well

understand that at twenty-two one can not settle down into a brooding hen ! Their grandpapa takes them out to walk with a German nurse ; he had just bought enough chocolate for them, at Masson's, to give them half a dozen indigestions. ' Doctor,' I said to him, ' are you not ashamed to injure these delightful little beings with that inflammatory substance ? And their stomachs — you don't think of that ? ' ' Bah ! ' he answered me, ' there is no such thing as indigestion ! ' As I was not convinced, he added : ' There are invalids who believe in indigestion ; but doctors don't believe in it. ' ' If they were mine,' I answered, ' they should not eat all that in six months, you may be sure ! ' ' Well, do you want them ? I give them to you,' said the doctor, ' only you must take the grandfather into the bargain ; and you must let them have their chocolate this time. The next time, it is you who will buy it for them. ' ' Agreed,' I answered, and left him. I thought it was a joke, naturally, and thought no more about it ; when, that evening, about nine o'clock, who should arrive but the doctor ! ' It is in earnest, you know,' said he ; ' I have given you my grandchildren, and I can not take them back ; and besides, their mother is enchanted ; I dined with her, and she thanked me for my having given the little ones such a pretty grandmother. There, you are a grandmother ; and confess that it has not cost you much trouble. ' You can well understand, dear friends, that I am used up. One doesn't marry like that, merely from having met, in the Rue Vivienne, some children loaded with chocolates ; but, little by little, the doctor has proved to me that I can not do better ; and finally I believe he is right. He is fifty-two years old, but he

does not look forty-five ; he is rich, very rich ; he has but one daughter, the mother of my little ones. You know him well, Aline—and you have seen him, Julie-nne. It is Doctor Leconteux.”

“A charming man !” said Aline, ready to burst with laughter, but still restraining herself. “But what a droll way of getting married, my good friend !”

“That is true ! The circumstances of it are original, but the marriage is honorable. When one has called herself Dalibaud for so long a time, one can well call herself Leconteux for the rest of her life.”

Roberta heaved a sigh—for the pleasure of sighing, no doubt ; for she had a soul as airy as the flight of a bird.

“When will the marriage take place,” asked Julie-nne.

“In about a month ; time to get everybody dressed, the children, their mother, and myself ; I shall be married in heliotrope, it is so becoming by daylight, and it is so suitable for a widow.—Aline, I will make you a present of a dress and a bonnet. Widows don’t have bridesmaids ; otherwise, I would have put you in rose-color ; but we will easily find some pretty costume, and it shall be my loves of little ones who shall make the search. How nice that will be ! I know where there are some enormous hats, even larger than those they have ; I will order two alike for them ; nothing but lace and white feathers ! You will see !”

She was truly happy, the pretty Roberta, talking of these immense hats ; and it was not only the pleasure of bedizening the babies that caused her eyes to shine and her lips to laugh ; there was something deeper in this animation—the happiness of being petted and

caressed, even in an interested way, by the little children.

Julienne looked at her with interest, so different from that which she had shown in these latter days; and all at once she kissed her tenderly.

"You have done well," she said to her; "you are marrying a mature and wise man, whose position places him beyond all mercenary suspicion. You are going to employ your existence in loving these little ones; and, later on, it is they who will spoil you. I have always thought that you needed to have children; you will want nothing more now. I am very glad, my dear Roberta."

"It is all, however, on account of Aline!" said Madame Dalibaud, turning toward the young girl.

"Of me, my good friend?"

"Yes, of you! I had accustomed myself to have you there; I was very weary without you; and there was still another thing— In fine, all is well that ends well; is it not so?"

"I am absolutely of that opinion, pretty lady," said Monsieur Leroy, who had come in on this phrase—"all is well that ends well; but may I ask to what this wise aphorism refers?"

He had kissed Julienne and her daughter on the forehead, and went to seat himself opposite Roberta.

"It is my good friend, who is going to marry two little children!" said Aline, whose access of mirth had not altogether ended.

"Two little children—at the same time?" said the philosopher, maliciously.

"And the grandfather into the bargain," gayly concluded the lovely woman; "I invite you to my wed-

ding, Monsieur Leroy, and to the breakfast. Since I am going to marry a doctor who doesn't believe in indigestion, it will be a serious breakfast!"

"I accept with thanks," said Leroy. "I eat only boiled eggs, but there is a certain luxury in seeing your neighbor feeding on truffles. You are fond of little children, then, dear madame?"

"I adore them! There is nothing more charming in the world; think of it! three and four years old!"

"Yes. Unfortunately, it is like kittens; in growing up, they lose their charm."

"Oh!" said Madame Dalibaud, thoughtlessly; "afterward, there will be others. My step-daughter is only twenty-two."

"It is perfect, then," concluded Leroy, drawing out his snuff-box.

Roberta remained silent, absorbed in her felicity. Leroy had answered Julianne's anxious look by the finest impassiveness. Aline, whose gayety seemed to fall suddenly, waited, with bowed head, for she knew not what.

"Ah!" cried Madame Dalibaud; "and my second piece of news! But you did not know him, perhaps? People are talking only of that to-day."

Julianne had made a negative sign with the head, without taking her eyes off her old friend. Leroy squirmed about in his arm-chair, ready to turn the conversation, but he hadn't the time.

"The handsome Dorsay! You know Léon Dorsay, the favorite of ladies? It seems that he was, above all, the favorite of actresses. He has taken himself off!"

"Taken himself off?" repeated Julianne, stooping

to pick up a book which she had knocked on the floor to distract attention.

"Taken himself off to Belgium, leaving his dupes. It is for more than six hundred thousand francs!—from people who have intrusted their money to him, as a friend, to buy securities, or to make it productive. Poor people! When one thinks that I—"

She stopped; all eyes were fixed upon her; she blushed, and resumed abruptly: "Without the wisdom of my notary, I would perhaps have lost everything; I, also"—Bethinking herself, she turned toward Julienne: "You are not in for anything—you, at least?"

Madame Breton cast a swift glance at Aline, who listened, very pale but firm, with a sort of exaltation in her eyes.

"For nothing," she said, slowly; "and I bless Heaven for it!"

"He tried to get money out of you?" insisted Roberta.

"Yes."

"Like myself. However, he is gone and we are safe. When one thinks that I gave a dinner to this man! I had perfect confidence in him! He had such a gentlemanly manner! Many people were deceived by it; the proof of it is the number of his dupes."

"Suppose we talk of something else," said Leroy. "This gentleman has never pleased me; and I feel no pleasure in thinking of persons who are not sympathetic with me."

"You are very right!" said Madame Dalibaud, getting up. "Besides, I must go. I have chattered like a magpie! But one does not marry again every

day ! Come and dine with me, all three of you, on Sunday, at eight ; and I will make you acquainted with my new family. You shall see my little ones ! They dine at half-past six ; because, at eight o'clock, they carry them off to bed."

"What wisdom !" murmured Monsieur Leroy, while Julianne and her daughter saw Roberta to the door.

When they had both returned to him, he looked at them one after the other. Aline, wan as a candle, had kept in her eyes a somber flame like that of martyrs—a flame where there was joy with a surprising intensity of grief.

"You are sufficiently punished," said the old godfather, taking Aline in his arms ; "I will say nothing more to you. You are brave ; you have borne it well."

"It is because I do not love him," said the young girl, in a hollow voice. "If I had loved him, I should be dead with shame, here, now. A thief ! a thief !"

She repeated the word again, lower and lower, as if to sink it into the depths of her conscience ; and remained with her head bowed down and her hands inert.

"Have you my letter ?" asked Julianne.

"Unfortunately, no ! he has not returned, as you may suppose. He had left the night before, the first time I went there ! We shall probably never obtain it ; it is annoying, but, after all, it is not a catastrophe.—Aline, come, pull yourself together a bit ; honor is safe, the money also—what the devil—!"

"Yes," she said, "but the grief I have caused my mother !"

"That will right itself also," replied Leroy, tenderly, while Julianne kissed Aline.

"Not in my conscience," murmured the young girl. "I have a pain in my heart when I look at these hairs."

"Think no more of it, my child," said her mother, caressing her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LÉON DORSAY had repaired to Brussels, in fact. When he returned to his house, he found a frightful batch of letters ; those from whom he asked money refusing it to him, and those to whom he owed it demanding it. Cursing fortune and Madame Breton, who had not been able to spare the several hundreds of thousands of francs which people had generously attributed to her, he packed a valise with the most necessary objects, together with what remained to him of value—and the sum was not large—and he took the next train for the north. Some hundreds of thousands of francs might, perhaps, have saved him once more ! His position depended entirely on his credit ; in prolonging his credit, he might have recovered another position ; he had seen himself driven into a corner of this sort so many times, and relief having come in a manner often wholly unforeseen, he had ended by believing that he would always pull through. This time nothing had relieved him, it was the finish ; he must kill himself, or leave ; he “took himself off,” according to Madame Dalibaud’s expression. At thirty-nine one generally loves life extremely, because one knows what it can yield.

A week after his arrival in England—for he had only passed through Belgium—while arranging his

papers he found Julianne's letter ; his first movement was to tear it up, then he thought better of it. Aline had inflicted a severe emotion upon him, by guessing his thoughts, on the day of their last conversation ; it was on this account that the recollection of the young girl inspired him with an uncommon respect, at the same time that a certain regret— For what? He could not say, for he had not loved her. He turned and re-turned the letter several times between his fingers ; then he took one of his cards and an envelope, and on the envelope he wrote Aline's name and address ; on the card, under his name, he added, "With his regrets." One moment he sought for an adjective, but found none ; then he closed the envelope, put the letter in the box, and the next day embarked for South America.

When Aline received the letter post-marked at London, she experienced a great agony. Although she had never seen Dorsay's writing, she guessed that the letter came from him. Without hesitating, she took it to her mother, who opened it. The contents of the missive left them silent. Julianne, after having re-read the letter, tore it into bits which she threw into the fire. The card remained on the table. Aline took it up and gazed at it for a long time with a singular emotion.

"Do not be sad," said her mother to her.

"I am not sad, mamma ; I was wondering what motive guided him when he wrote those three words."

"We shall never know, my daughter ; but be sure that the return of my letter will weigh at the day of judgment in the scale of his good actions."

Life resumed its accustomed course in the Rue Lafayette; the Easter holidays brought a welcome respite in the occupation of the two women, who were able to rest a little. Aline had great need of it; she had grown very thin and pale; and her beautiful gray eyes, veiled in melancholy, had not their usual fire.

"This child is not well," said Madame Reynard one day, who watched her closer than she had thought; "you ought to take her into the country."

"If you would like it," said Julianne to her daughter, "we will go and pass a week at Nogent; my godfather would be very glad to have us."

"I should like it very much," answered Aline.

She now willingly accepted all proposals, instead of opposing them as formerly for the sole pleasure of the struggle.

On leaving, Madame Reynard discreetly touched Julianne's arm and led her into a corner, out of sight of the young girl.

"Well! about your projects?" she said, in a low voice.

"They have had no results," answered Julianne, not daring to make a more frank response.

"Then my son can present himself?"

"No; not now—wait a little. At this moment she has no inclination for marriage."

"So much the worse!" said the excellent old woman, smiling. "But at that age such thoughts can not last long. Might not Albert make love to her without seeming to do so?"

"Oh! certainly!"

"I am going to take this good news to him. And

try to bring back an Aline who has rosy cheeks, with brilliant eyes ! ”

Madame Breton and her daughter arrived at their friend's on a spring day which seemed like a day in autumn ; a small fine rain streaked the sky slantingly, beaded the bare branches of the trees, and formed on the ground inexhaustible little rivulets. The great garden, usually so bright, seemed tragic, with its naked twigs and Wellingtonia, which, being equally obstinate in not growing and not dying, made a black blot on the lawn, yet without color. This backward spring-time showed no outward sign which allowed it to place itself in accord with the calendar.

The house, warmed from top to bottom by a furnace, received them with an extremely good grace. The willing cook, in a very white apron and cap, stood before her shining stove, proud of her regiment of brilliant saucepans ; in the dining-room, a bouquet of violets indicated the seats of the two ladies ; on the threshold of the parlor, the master of the house, clothed in his finest dressing-gown, opening over a black costume, waited for his friends with an air of good humor.

“ Aline, you will excuse my dressing-gown,” said he ; “ it keeps me warm in the calves of my legs ; and you will remark that, underneath it, I am dressed as if for dining out. Imagine that it is a black coat, a little loose, a little long, of maroon color, and the illusion will be complete. Good-morning, my little daughters ; so you have come to see the hermit of Nogent ? The house is at your service, and the proprietor thanks you for being so good as to do him the honor of occupying his dwelling. Choose your chambers ; they are

all warmed, and all at your disposition. I have had an idea about it, as you will easily see ; but if I have mistaken your taste, there is very little alteration to make."

In one of the numerous rooms on the first floor, Julianne found, in fact, on the table a superb purple cineraria, covered with blossoms ; the adjoining chamber, hung in rose cretonne, gave asylum to a deutzia, whose fine white bell-flowers trembled at the least movement of the floor.

"One could not have chosen better !" said Julianne, on descending to dinner ; "and you have spoiled us, godfather !"

"It is because I am happy to see you at my house ! To-morrow, you shall go into the conservatory, and choose all the flowers you wish ; to-day, I thought only of finding two which had no odor, so as not to inconvenience you."

The genial warmth of the house and the cordiality of the host produced a calming effect on Aline, and very soon Monsieur Leroy saw her smile. The incidents of her little childhood returned to her memory with a charm which she had never yet known ; for, with her mind always reaching forward to a future, more or less removed, she had never allowed herself to revert to the sweetness of the past.

"It is strange," said she—while the servant brought the dessert ; savory apples, fragrant grapes, preserved by the fruit-man since the preceding autumn, according to the traditions of the old house—"I have never taken account of the power of memory ; and all at once, on seeing this crystal bowl, in which they served sweetmeats in the time of the good Madame Leroy, I

am reminded of many things, grandfather. I recall the pretty face of your dear wife, and her beautiful black eyes, and her sweet smile, with all her fine teeth. I can see her now, herself—as if she were in your place, and you opposite. The good old times!—and how gay the house was, as well as I can remember!—I have given you pain—oh! pardon me, grandfather!”

She put out her hand toward the old man's arm, with a caressing gesture; he wiped his eyes.

“No, my child,” said he, “it does not give me pain to remember my dead wife, nor to hear her praised; it is a sweet emotion; for in thirty-five years of living together, during which we experienced all sorts of griefs, not a single one came to me through her, nor, I hope, to her through me. You remember her, Aline? I believed you had forgotten her. It is twelve years since she departed; and you were very small.”

“I also thought I had forgotten her; and all at once, I seem to have seen her again, as if a door had been opened in my memory. You used to have a window there!” said the young girl, pointing to a place in the wall.

“Yes, truly. It was walled up, because it put my poor wife in a perpetual current of air; between the window and the chimney, it was too much; the door was enough.”

“There was a window,” resumed Aline, searching in her memory; “and a glycine that was always trying to get in. I remember. How many things there are in a crystal bowl, grandfather.”

“Look at it,” said the old man, with a smile; “was it notched at that time?”

"Yes! a little notch in the cover; and there it is!"

"You don't take any sweetmeats?" said the host, seeing that she remained silent and absorbed.

"No, thank you, grandfather; I am not hungry."

Julienne and her godfather exchanged glances; and for a moment the noise of sleet against the window-shutters and the crackling of the big log in the fireplace played a little dramatic duo. Monsieur Leroy got up.

"If you please, my children," said he, "we will go to the parlor, there is a fire there; but if you think with me, we will go up to my chamber; it is large, and full of comfortable seats, and I have a habit of passing my evenings there when I am alone."

"Let us go up, grandfather," said Aline; "we shall be better with you."

She had never shown any tenderness to her mother's old friend, whom she had accused of secret hostility toward herself; but recent events had given her a respect for Monsieur Leroy's far-seeing wisdom; and his goodness, which she had at last discovered, inspired her all at once with a sort of tenderness. On seeing the house again, where she had formerly learned to stand upon her little feet, a whiff of recollections had mounted to her brain, like a perfume, and her complex feelings wrapped her in a sort of affectionate melancholy, which was an absolutely new sensation to her.

"She hasn't a hard heart, but only closed," said Monsieur Leroy to Julienne, when she found herself alone with him the next morning; "closed somewhat by her distrustful nature, and a good deal by a bad

conception of life which has crept into her while she was yet very young."

"I can not understand where that has come from," said Madame Breton; "up to the age of twelve she had never left me, and her defects were already quite pronounced at her father's death."

"Does any one know where our children take their bent?" answered the old man, sadly. "A misunderstood reading, sometimes; a word overheard in conversation—some word which set up as a virtue an exceptional merit—but which was not appreciated. Look you, Julianne, nearly all the misfortunes of life come from misunderstandings—misunderstandings of all sorts—of pride, of dignity, of anger, of tenderness. If only one could explain himself! If those who have misunderstood could only come to an understanding with those who have badly expressed themselves, how many misfortunes would be avoided, and how many heartaches! But one side does not think of explaining and the other does not care to seek an explanation! Everybody thinks himself more intelligent than his neighbor—or sharper; and one sinks more and more in doubt, in distrust, in the bog of all bad feelings, until the time when one is altogether swallowed up in a quicksand."

He sighed; his best friends did not know what he had suffered; for, if he was always ready to help others, he had never sought help from any one.

"Aline will recover from it," he resumed, after a moment's pause; "but she needs a severe lesson. Are you going to Paris soon?"

"Yes; I have forgotten to give some necessary orders at home. I shall be absent only two or three hours."

"Very well ; leave Aline with me. I see she has a wish to talk with me ; and in her present state of mind she will say things to me which she would not confess before you. Do not sigh ; this time, my little daughter, there will be no distrust of you, but rather tenderness. Go ; and do not torment yourself."

"Be indulgent, godfather," insisted the tender mother. "This morning she has learned that her picture has been refused by the jury of admission at the *Salon* ; she has not seemed to mind it, but I am sure it has been a terrible blow to her."

"Come ; so much the better !" said Monsieur Leroy, quietly ; "it is a lesson which was deserved, and which will be very profitable to her. You can depend upon me not to render your daughter miserable."

The next day, about three o'clock, Juliette left. The weather was finer, the wind had dried the road. Those who remained behind went to the window to watch the traveler to the turning of the street which led to the station ; she sent a last friendly gesture to them, and when she had disappeared Monsieur Leroy turned to the other window of his chamber which looked toward the garden and toward the admirable banks of the Marne.

A light fall of snow, at dawn, had remained on the lawn ; but, in spite of the obstinate cold, the crocuses, with which the turf was strewn, opened their little lilac or orange cups.

"Flowers, in spite of the snow !" said Aline, astonished.

"Flowers under the rain and the snow, under the sleet which beat upon the shutters last night, under the frost which is coming perhaps to destroy them to-

night ; yes, my child ! Flowers, because it is the spring-time, and the earth wishes to burst forth. And she must burst forth, she must blossom, she must deck herself, in spite of the cold, because her time has come, as for all living things."

With her forehead against the glass, Aline listened and looked. The slender branches of the trees, to her right, sketched a fine gray lace-work against the sky ; while their buds, all ready to burst forth, formed darker and thicker knots, like a magnificent piece of *point d'Alençon*. Beyond, before her, on the banks of Villiers, were depicted elegant masses of woods, of parks, of forests still somber ; and in the blue sky light clouds, driven by a brisk wind, passed, from time to time, over the pale gold of the sun ; the roofs dropped the melting snow with a musical sound ; and the sparrows, by hundreds, twittered all about the house and in the trellises now covered only with bare branches, but which in June would be a mass of leaves and flowers.

"It is beautiful !" said the young girl, in a low voice, as if in a dream.

Leroy respected her meditation, as every wise being ought to respect the seed that is sprouting. In these vague sensations, in these almost unconscious melancholies, the soul of Aline, whose wings scarcely dared to open themselves, was fluttering.

"You have lived here a long time ?" asked she, all at once, of her old friend, who was seated opposite the landscape.

"Forty-three years," answered he, with a sort of tranquil pride.

"I am only nineteen," murmured Aline, looking

out again. "Has it changed much?" she asked next.

"As to the general aspect, very little. Houses have been built, woods have grown, but what I see from here is almost what I saw when I came. From another point of view, the country, which was poor, has become rich."

He did not add that he had been the principal author of the change, but Aline knew it. She came and seated herself near him, with her eyes turned toward the landscape, which the shadows rendered alternately bright or gloomy.

"Grandfather," said she, "I see that I have failed in my life."

"Do you think so?" said the old philosopher, taking care not to smile. "And why do you think so?"

"I have voluntarily dried up my heart in looking for a factitious ideal. I have made a sort of idol of myself; I have subordinated my mother—and all the rest of the universe—to the wishes of this idol; and now, I can see plainly, I have warped my opinions, weakened the sincerity of my feelings, gone astray in my impressions. I have made a failure in my life."

"There is some truth in what you say," replied Monsieur Leroy, seeing that she became silent; "but at your age, the soul, the same as the body, has inexhaustible resources; they are capable of reconstructing themselves entirely in a very short time."

"And the evil that one has caused; do you think that one can also undo that—even in applying all one's forces to it during an entire existence?"

"I believe so; in great part, at least."

"You think that all wounds close ; that all pain is forgotten ?"

"Nearly all. There remain scars for the wounds ; for the pains, sadness ; but the blood and the tears end by drying up, when the cause which made them flow no longer exists."

"Do you think, grandfather," said Aline, turning toward him a face with trembling lips—"do you think I can restore my mother's black hairs ?"

"Aline," answered Monsieur Leroy, "it is forty-five years that I have had white hair ; they came to me in one night, because of the man who had betrayed my confidence, by running away with all my fortune and that of my wife."

Aline's trembling lips were pressed together, and her face became rigid.

"He took everything from me ; and more than that," continued Leroy, "for I was not in a condition to meet my commercial engagements, and I might have been disgraced."

"He paid it back to you ?" asked the young girl, without betraying emotion, but she was quite white.

"Partly. Others helped me, without my asking it. From several sides they brought me money. My hair became white, and has remained so ; but, my daughter, the recollection of that day is sacred to me ; it was a blessed day ! It allowed me to know the beauty of my wife's soul, the sweetness of friendship, and the joy of thankfulness."

The pale blue eyes of the old man were turned toward the sky, and seemed to reflect its tranquil clearness. Aline felt that her own grief became of small

moment, reduced itself to nothing, before this magnanimity of forgiveness.

"He robbed you—this man," said she, uneasily ;
"and you forgave him ?"

"Yes," said the old sage, nodding his head many times.

"A long time afterward ?"

"No; almost on the spot, when I saw what fine fellows I had for friends."

"Have you ever seen him again ?"

"Yes."

"Is he dead ?"

"Yes."

"Rich ?"

"In destitution ; that is to say, he was in destitution, but he did not die in it."

Aline had picked up from the table a very simple seal, which had engraved on it these words : "Let us be good." She looked at it an instant, then in a low voice she said : "I see ; you helped him."

"He well deserved it," said the old man, with a singular internal energy ; "I owed him so many exquisite delights !"

"Grandfather," said Aline, sliding to her knees beside his arm-chair, "forgive me ; I have misjudged you."

He placed one hand on her repentant head, which bent before him, and placed the other on his breast.

"Spare me, Aline," said he ; "spare my old heart, which beats too strong sometimes. You are a good child ; and you also will be happy."

Aline quickly seated herself in her place ; the

power of command which she had over herself had survived her metamorphosis.

"As for me," she replied, with an apparent tranquillity, "I am not made for happiness. After an error such as I have committed—"

"Hush!" said Monsieur Leroy, sweetly, placing his finger on his lips.

"No! I must remember it, I have no right to forget it. When I think that I wished to be the wife of a thief!"

"Perhaps he will do like mine," suggested the good man; "he may restore, in part!"

"No," said Aline, "he is not accessible to any good feeling."

"That is youth, all over!" said Monsieur Leroy, smiling. "Always extreme in judgment! Let us suppose that we know nothing about it, and that the chances of restitution are not very many; that will of itself be severe enough! And then, did he not send back your mother's letter?"

"So, if you were in my place, you would forgive him?"

"Assuredly; for, positively, I do not see the evil he has done! He had the candor to open your eyes—this very wicked gentleman. If you had married him, that would have been another thing!"

"For me, it is all one!" replied Aline, with bitterness. "I feel myself as degraded as if I had been his wife."

"O innocence! O virtue!" thought the philosopher, but he kept his exclamations to himself. "You are but a young Stoic," he said aloud; "that is to say, a young lady who takes chalk for cheese, and even

cheese for chalk, all to the injury of her poor little self!"

"You can't prevent my thinking what I please!" said Aline, with an offensive return of her quarrelsome disposition.

"Eh! if I am not mistaken, here is the 'old Adam' come back again! He isn't dead, then? Think anything you like, my dear child, only do not act; that is all that your mother and I ask of you for the moment."

"Act? Oh, don't be afraid; I shall not act! I am disgusted with marriage for the rest of my days."

"That is right!" thought Monsieur Leroy; "if she had not said that, she would have failed in her duty to the situation!—Really, to that extent?" he said aloud. "In the mean time it seems to me—"

"I implore you, grandfather!" insisted Aline, whose eyelashes restrained her tears.

He gazed at her with his clear eyes, which had lost a little of their vivacity in these latter days.

"Here are many children! They have eaten of the fruit of the tree of life, have found it bitter, and they say, 'I will not taste it again—never, never!' How many griefs and deceptions do you think, Aline, have entered into the life of a man of seventy-seven?"

She did not answer.

"Do you imagine," continued he, gazing out upon the landscape, which became sweetly melancholy, as the sun withdrew behind the woods, "can you imagine that one goes on to old age, and then to death, without having suffered, without having struggled, without having conquered?"

"I have struggled," murmured Aline.

"Yes, against those who love you ! That is not a struggle. You must struggle against yourself."

"I try to do so."

"And it is that which makes you better. You are suffering to-day, and your old grandfather by adoption receives the confidence of your honest grief. In spite of your suffering, examine yourself, Aline, and tell me the truth : are you not happier than at the time when, stung to the quick by a chimera, you struggled for your mistake, against your mother and myself ?"

"Yes," said the young girl, very low.

"You say, 'I have made a failure in my life !' But here it is—your life ! and this is what life is : it is to err, and to repent ; it is to repair the faults of pride by the tenderness of love ; it is to follow the human and divine law which says that man is feeble and mortal, but that pity is infinite. Your mother's pity toward you, Aline, is greater than the spaces in the sky."

"I know it," said she.

"Do you know what she has dreamed for you—this mother so outraged, so misunderstood ; this sad mother, whose heart you have made to bleed ? She has dreamed for you a tranquil future, with a man worthy of esteem ; with work for a faithful companion ; and with children to reward you, or to worry you, according as Fate shall decide it."

"Oh, no !" cried Aline ; "the sacrifice, yes ; the marriage, no !"

"In that case a barren life. Without doubt you can bring up and cherish other people's children, but you were right in saying that you were not born a pedagogue ; and this illusory maternity, so fruitful in other souls, would not fill yours—"

"One can be useful otherwise ; there is art."

"Not for you, Aline. Learn to understand the truth, my child. You are not gifted. Your father was ; but genius is not hereditary. And, then, art, particularly for a woman, ought to be only a resource ; she may be an artist, so be it ; but she is a woman above all. Man, himself, can not escape from this law ; so long as he lives who can pardon a man for being a bad citizen, under the pretext that he has genius ? Death alone effaces his crime. For a woman, the first duty is to be a woman and to fulfill the duties which Nature has imposed upon her—patience, honor, and tenderness. The rest comes afterward."

Aline listened. How little this humble ideal resembled that which she had proudly conjured up ! However, she felt that the old man spoke truly.

"Your mother desires to see you married," resumed Leroy ; "and she is right. Our society, with some rare exceptions, has no place of honor for those who avoid the duties of marriage and maternity. It is not for me, who know nothing about it, to decide whether this is wrong or right ; but, I do not know why, I always have a sort of respect for those whom I meet holding a child by the hand. Obey, therefore, your mother's wish, which is also that of nature and of society ; do not shut yourself in a proud celibacy, which may make others suppose that you wish to avoid the pains and difficulties of it ; only, know how to choose well ; seek in the past of the man, whose name you are to bear, for guarantees of honor for the future ; and love him. A marriage without love is but a burden for a man ; but for a woman, what a degradation ! And, for the rest, be prepared for suffering, but do not

invite it; there will always enough of it come to you to satisfy your thirst for expiation."

He finished, with his shrewd smile. This optimist had not many allusions; he had not much faith in men taken individually, but he had confidence in the goodness of the human race.

"Get married, to give my mother pleasure?" murmured Aline, no longer objecting to anything.

"No; get married because it is your duty, and because your mother desires to see you fulfill all the duties which she herself has so nobly accepted."

"Duty," said Aline, slowly; "how many forms it takes on! One does not know, sometimes, where it resides; and so many other things resemble it."

"If you wish to know where to find it to a certainty, love others, escape from yourself, sacrifice your caprices—and take heed of your mother."

The night fell slowly upon the hills while they thus talked together. In the room a grayish atmosphere softly surrounded the figures, robbing them of their too distinct outlines; outside, the landscape had retained its clearness and an infinite sweetness; it buried itself in the shadows imperceptibly and without a shock. A star showed itself in the sky, which had become very clear; and, almost immediately, in the distance one or two lights shone in the mist.

"This is how I shall die," suddenly said the old man, in his soft voice, weakened by the fatigue of this long conversation; "I shall fall asleep in a twilight becoming darker and darker; and all at once I shall become a small light—high, high up in the sky."

Aline recalled how he had come, on the day when they had buried her father, while her mother was gazing

at the stars ; she had never understood this thirst for contemplation which seizes upon the unhappy in presence of the purity of the stars.

"A small light," said the sage, in a voice more and more feeble ; "to be a small light on the earth, first (one can always do that) ; and then afterward, another, if that is possible—in the blue."

Madame Breton found them both silent in the growing obscurity, penetrated by a tender and profound emotion.

The lamp came in with her, carefully covered with a screen, to save the old man's eyes.

"Have you been very wise ?" said Juliette jestingly but uneasy to see them so little inclined for conversation.

"Yes, mamma," answered Aline, while kissing by stealth the hand which her tired old friend allowed to hang from the arm-chair.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHY do you not ask your friends to come and see you here?" asked Monsieur Leroy of Julienne, a day or two after this conversation. "You must have some charming friends, calm, good people, like you and myself."

Madame Breton hesitated. "Later," said she; "at this moment, I do not dare do it."

Her godfather understood, and did not insist upon it.

"We have the Dalibaud wedding to divert us; do not let us forget it!" said he, laughing. "That will afford us amusement for an indefinite time."

The day fixed for the marriage of the amiable widow was quite near, in fact. The ceremony took place with an incredible vivacity. The bride, in heliotrope velvet, as she had announced, with a delicious little bonnet, was as young and pretty as could be wished; the groom took his part very gayly under the light ridicule which the disappointed fellows were able to find in the situation. The two babies, behatted with an amusing exaggeration of by-gone fashions, took up the collection with an inconceivable gravity. The only incident to be regretted was a certain greediness on the part of the little boy, who was not willing on any terms to give up the purse in which they had put so many

beautiful pieces of gold and silver, and who cried out like a peacock, while pressing it against his heart with so little care that the whole collection rolled out on the threshold of the vestry. Madame Dalibaud—or rather Madame Leconteux—was rather disturbed by it, on her *prie-dieu* of fringed velvet; but the mother of the young culprit had interposed almost at once, and a calm was soon re-established.

The reception was magnificent. All the friends and enemies of the husband and wife were collected, either to bring them good wishes, or to whisper to them something spiteful. Madame Leconteux thanked the one, and laughed in the faces of the others; she had the consciousness of doing wrong to no one, and of giving herself any amount of satisfaction; which gave her a soul beyond the reach of any possible malice.

The breakfast was sumptuous, and (one would hardly believe it; but, unlikely as it may appear, there are in Paris two or three houses where it can be done) as savory as it was ornamental. Monsieur Leroy was very much astonished to see the butler, followed by two waiters, bring to him, with great pomp, four boiled eggs in a silver contrivance very well designed. The bride, who was watching him, laughed with all her heart on receiving the ceremonious salute of the old fan-maker; after six weeks she had contrived this dish to show him her good memory. Leroy ate two of the eggs, and amused himself very much in watching the other guests, not only in their eating, but in their acting and talking. The misfortune of this sort of feast generally is that every one is occupied with himself or his neighbor; but those who are troubled about nothing nearly always extract from it something pleasant.

Julienne had been delighted to greet her dear Madame Reynard at the church, whom she had not expected to see there ; but, as the old lady observed to her, at marriages and funerals one must be prepared to meet the most unexpected faces. Who knows by what ramifications two persons, who see each other every day, shall happen to meet at the nuptials of a third, whom they do not see once in two years, and of whom they have never had an idea of talking ! Madame Breton took advantage of this occasion to beg her friend to come, with her son, to pass the day at Nogent on the following Sunday, which would be the first Sunday in May. It was not without some apprehension that she thus invited her ; for nothing in Aline's attitude permitted her to suppose that she had changed her mind relative to Albert Reynard. Nevertheless, on hearing of the invitation, Aline contented herself with saying, " You have done well, mamma " ; which brought back some hope to Julienne's heart.

After the splendors of the Dalibaud-Leconteux wedding, it was a real repose to see the young verdure in the garden at Nogent again ; and, after the emotions of the month of March, it was also a soothing and sweet thing to meet again the good Madame Reynard, refined, affectionate, and simple at the same time. She and her son seemed perfectly placed in the frame which Monsieur Leroy's house made for them ; they had, all three, the same tranquil good-nature, the same delicate mind, the same discreet charm, without any affectation of good company. Aline listened to them, surprised and content to see persons of such different condition and education get along so well together ; instinctively, she felt that the bond, by which a young professor of Chap-

tal and an old manufacturer of fans found themselves drawn together at first sight, although invisible, was much stronger than the simple duties of good-will and respect ; they understood each other at once, notwithstanding the difference of their ages, because their general sentiments were of the same kind and of the same origin. It was in the same way Madame Reynard and Julienne had loved each other for nearly twenty years.

While they were walking, with slow steps, along the lanes which led to the Marne, Aline observed, by stealth, "the little schoolmaster." He was almost exactly the same height with herself ; and when they talked, their eyes met on the same level ; although, having a higher forehead, he overtopped her by a few lines. Reynard's eyes were deep and sweet, like those of his mother ; from time to time a flash brightened them, when a generous idea was expressed in his presence, and then died out, while the mouth, with a sort of smile, finished the thought. These movements of his countenance had a great charm, and Aline soon felt the attraction of it.

At first curiosity had made her try to read on this young man's face that he loved her ; but interest succeeded, without displacing curiosity. Nothing in Albert's manner would have made the young girl think that he brought her such an affection ; he was the same with her as with the others ; more reserved, doubtless ; but Leroy's and Julienne's age, and the respect he bore them, preventing all familiarity, his bearing toward them was scarcely different.

"Is it thus that one loves?" thought Aline ;
"without words, without looks, without anything which

reveals an inward trouble? Is it possible that this young man wishes to marry me ; and that, being master of his actions, he pushes delicacy to the extent of sparing me answering his importunate endearments ? ”

She conceived a regard for him, and shortly after an esteem, on this account. At the end of some weeks she was astonished at herself for feeling a little irritation at this perfect calm, which nothing seemed able to disturb. If he really loved her, it was in a very resigned fashion ; or, indeed, was he capable of hiding his impressions to that extent ?

In their conversations, which were not unusual now, he never spoke of himself, and very seldom did he make any allusion to Aline herself ; their talk, while the two mothers chatted together, turned upon general topics, and sometimes on the events of the day. He possessed a genuine eloquence, and, when he became a little animated, his fine voice, without being raised, took on accents of an irresistible persuasion, although Aline was not always convinced.

“How those children squabble ! ” said Madame Reynard, smiling.

Often Aline would have wished the discussion to degenerate into a quarrel ; Albert’s superiority irritated her, no matter how carefully he tried to conceal it under the forms of an extreme gentleness ; this very gentleness was an aggravation to the still uneasy mind of the young rebel ; and she more than once finished the conversation by a hard word, which did not admit of a reply. Albert would then turn toward his mother or Madame Breton, and, without affectation of any sort, would draw them into a conversation of a different nature. The lesson was involuntary, and, moreover,

very light, but Aline felt it strongly ; at once she would become mute and angry ; later, she was sad and repentant.

Albert's pretended calm cost him dear ; at the very moment when the young girl was reproaching him for it the most, he was sometimes despairing of gaining her.

"She will not love me," said he, one evening to his mother, as they were returning to their Boulevard, after having passed two hours at Madame Breton's ; "I do not know how to touch her, I only know how to irritate her. There is, between her and me, something indefinable, which makes me fear, each time I leave her, that I will never see her again ; and it is a suspense which is becoming intolerable."

"Patience, my son," answered Madame Reynard. "What there is between you is her pride. Aline is a proud girl, who will not submit until quite reduced ; but then she will have finished the cycle of her metamorphosis ; and on the day when she tells you that she consents to be your wife, you may be certain of having for a companion, no longer a child, but a consort, a veritable helpmate, according to the touching expression of our ancestors."

"Do you think that day is coming ?" said he again, discouraged.

"It is less far away than you suppose. Remember what I told you in the month of March.

"Are you certain, mother, that there remains nothing in Aline's heart of—the hesitation which she felt then ?"

"She seems to me entirely changed. I have not dared to question her mother, you understand ; she

has told me only that this project has had no results. You ought to know Aline well enough by this time to be sure that, if she thought of another, she would not let you come about her with so much confidence."

"You are right," said he ; "and yet I am not reassured."

The summer was very cold ; the vacation was near ; and every one was busy in looking for some fresh corner, to take refuge there during the two months' holidays, which are the real independence of professors. Every year Madame Reynard and her son went to Auvergne, where a relation offered them a hospitality which could not be called disinterested, for their visit was the sole enjoyment of this old woman, who was almost infirm and without children. Julienne had promised Monsieur Leroy to install herself at Nogent with her daughter.

The latter became more and more nervous and uneasy as the day drew near for the change. A very singular notion had got into her mind ; and she did not dare to confide it to her mother, from shame of spirit, or perhaps more from a remnant of pride. While Albert was despairing of getting her, she had ended by persuading herself that, discouraged by her defects, he no longer cared for her. The reasons of delicacy which forbade the young man from advancing more frankly, also hindered Aline from showing him a more open sympathy. Embarrassed, both of them, they had ended by taking an attitude of reserve, almost like that of hostility.

"One would say they had taken a dislike to each other," said Julienne, one evening, to her friend. It was a warm evening in August ; the next day, the two

families were to pass the day together at Nogent, where Madame Breton would remain, while Madame Reynard would leave the day after with Albert.

"If you only knew what a heartache my son has!" answered the good creature, in a low voice; "I pity him! He no longer tells me anything; but I believe he is really sick with it. This separation is going to cause him a frightful illness. If Aline is never going to love him, she ought in charity to tell him so at once; for then he might try to cure himself—or, rather, I would try. Tell me, my good friend, do you think there is any hope for him?"

Julienne did not answer at once. Aline, who for some time had been more open and confidential with her mother, had, for two or three weeks past, entrenched herself in a return of her silence and apparent coldness; and, from a fear of appearing exacting, Madame Breton had not dared challenge her confidences.

"I am almost as grieved as you," she said to her old friend; "and yet I have good hope. Tell your son to question Aline; he has a right to do so, since both of us approve his project. Let her decide his fate. I thought I knew my daughter; but it must be said that she always keeps some new surprise for me. If Albert is suffering, it ought to be ended before your departure. Notwithstanding the profound grief which I should feel at renouncing him for a son-in-law, I should never forgive myself for egotistically prolonging his pain."

The two friends parted, sadly enough.

On going to her chamber that night, Julienne, instead of going to bed, seated herself without a light at

her window, where a ray of the moon penetrated, and set herself to dreaming. The change, which had taken place in Aline within several months, was great, and, moreover, guaranteed in the future a more complete metamorphosis; herein was a great consolation in the present and in the future; but Julianne would have wished to be sure that a new caprice should not spring up in that young brain, still badly balanced. She feared all crotchets, likely or unlikely; not knowing yet what might grow in that soul which did not know itself. For the first time, Madame Breton thought of her own death with a shiver; what would become of this ill-disciplined child if bad luck should decide that she should be left without guidance? A great lassitude fell upon the poor woman, already depressed under the weight of her burden, in thinking that she could not rid her mind of this agonizing solicitude, so long as Aline had not taken that regular position in life which marriage alone can give. And who but Albert Reynard was capable of directing that intellect and that heart, still uncertain of their road?

Julianne's eyes were still bathed in despairing tears, when Aline came in very softly.

"Mamma! not asleep yet? You are not ill?" said she, with a start.

"No; but you—what do you want?" answered Julianne, not less frightened.

"I saw from my window that your blinds were not closed; I was afraid you had left your window open, and I came to shut it, without waking you."

Madame Breton drew her daughter near her. Aline seated herself on a small chair, with her elbows resting on her mother's knees.

"Thank you," said Julianne, sweetly, "for having thought of your mother's health."

"O mamma, what a reproach! That tells me that I have not accustomed you to my care! It is true; but I intend to make amends for that. You shall see!"

"You will have something else to do in life than to take care of your old mother! You will have your husband, your children—"

Aline lowered her head. "Mamma," said she, sadly, "do you wish very much that I should marry?"

"Most certainly!"

"I am afraid of marriage."

Julianne did not answer; she sought to understand the meaning of this speech, and not wishing to question her daughter.

"I am afraid of binding myself for my whole life; I am still so uncertain and wavering! Isn't it curious? Only six months ago, I would have sworn that I knew my own mind thoroughly; it was so fixed, so positive! And then, at present, I know nothing about it. It seems to me that I am going adrift, like a disabled vessel."

She laughed, but her laugh was tearful.

"Is it only on that account, my darling?" asked Julianne, gently.

"I do not know whether it is only for that! Perhaps yes, perhaps no! All of you around me, for some time, have set yourselves to upset my brain; I no longer recognize anything. It is like a closet, where one has changed the place of everything."

She tried a little burst of laughter, and hid her face in her hands, which was suddenly covered with tears.

"If it is only a question of putting it in order?" suggested Madame Breton, trying to carry on the joke, but in a voice which trembled.

"Mamma!" suddenly said Aline, in a deep voice, "look you: I am afraid that nobody can really love me, except you!"

"What an idea! Are you not surrounded with affection on all sides?"

"Yes, for love of you; but if you were not here, how I should be forsaken! The only person who might have loved me for myself—you will be very much astonished—is Madame Dalibaud; Madame Leconteux, I should say. I said well that you would be astonished! It is the exact truth. Remember how she proposed to take care of me when you went away! That was friendship! That was disinterested affection; for you know, mamma, that at bottom it was not at all to give you pleasure!"

"It was to give pleasure to herself," said Julienne. "But I believe, in fact, that she really loved you; and she loves you still, I am sure."

"But she loves me a great deal!" cried Aline; "since she has married again especially; meantime we need not conceal from ourselves that her little children are between us. You have dispelled my last illusion, mamma! I thought, once in my life, to have inspired a friendship; I deceived myself. Adieu my dear illusion! you may wish good-morning, on my part, to the others, when you meet them!"

"Aline," said Julienne with a tender gravity, "why do you not wish to marry Albert Reynard, who loves you?"

Aline started.

"Who loves you tenderly and passionately," continued Madame Breton; "who loves you for yourself, one might say in spite of yourself? Is it possible that he does not inspire you with a little affection in return?"

The young girl had withdrawn her burning face into the shade, and her mother could only see that her eyes were full of tears. After a silence, she said, "Mamma, do you think that, after having so foolishly imagined that I loved a worthless man, I have the right to marry a good man?"

"Do I believe it?" said Julienne, shocked. "Certainly I believe it! In the first place, you did not love him, this unworthy man; you told me that you did not love him!"

"That is true," answered Aline with an accent of sincerity. "But it is enough that I should have thought of becoming his wife, in order that my soul should be soiled."

"My daughter," said Madame Breton, with severity, "I was asking myself just now what new caprice, what absurd fancy, would get into your head; but I was far from supposing that you would take yourself to task in this unjust fashion! Your soul is not soiled; it is pure, even to being fanciful! You—who aimed at being positive and practical—you soar away to the most inveterate romances!"

"Then, you think," replied Aline, bowing her head to the lecture—"you think, mamma, that I can marry—him whom you have chosen for me, without being wanting toward him?"

"That, my daughter, is an affair of the conscience. If you can not give him the affection he gives you, do

not marry him. Nothing is worse than a marriage without love. It is a bargain where honest people are the dupes."

Aline pressed against her mother and surrounded her with her arms.

"My mother," said she, quite low, "my true friend, let your heart guide me, let your love counsel me; I place myself in your hands, as feeble and helpless as on the day of my birth. You have given me everything, I owe everything to you; I am nothing without you; do with me what you please."

Julienne understood that her daughter loved Albert Reynard; but, after being so cruelly deceived, she did not dare to say so, nor perhaps to own it to herself.

"I order you to be happy," said she, embracing her. "And in the mean time go and sleep, for we have a busy day before us to-morrow."

CHAPTER XX.

THE next morning was one of those exquisite days which are like divine smiles. It passed quickly, like everything delicious. At noon, Madame Reynard and her son arrived at Nogent, where Monsieur Leroy, escorted by his friends, was waiting for them at the station. The first look cast by Albert upon Aline made him understand that he no longer had anything to fear; the young girl wore a look of anxious sweetness, very different from her attitude during these last days; and the tenderness which she showed to Madame Reynard spoke still louder.

The breakfast was more noisy than really gay. Some friends of Monsieur Leroy, who had dropped in according to the custom of the hospitable house, filled the dining-room with their laughter and their jokes; but the invited guests had in themselves a satisfaction which even this uproar could not disturb. They went down to the banks of the Marne, walking in a group; Monsieur Leroy and Madame Reynard, less active, had remained on the terrace to chat of old times, and to hope for future happiness—not for themselves, old sages retired from life, but for those to whom youth had opened the gates of life.

Albert and Aline walked thus all the afternoon, sometimes near one another, sometimes separated by

the chance of conversation ; they had not said a word to each other, they had not looked at each other a single time ; and yet their hearts were full of bliss, in spite of a remnant of uneasiness hidden in Aline's heart. She had taken a great resolution ; and, at the moment of executing it, she experienced a quaking of the heart, which was not without its delights, and which partook of intoxication and of agony at the same time—those two things so near and yet so different.

At last the sun went down ; the guests dispersed by degrees ; some continued to follow the banks of the river, while others left in boats ; toward six o'clock, of all the guests there only remained in the Isle of Beauty the young people with Madame Breton and an old neighbor of Leroy, very gouty, whom they had met on the river-bank, and who would at any cost remain in their company.

The marvelous viaduct of the Mulhouse Railway outlined against a clear sky, its arches, of such rare proportions that one could not realize its extent without coming quite near to it ! In the framework of its arches one could see the gentle river, its islands and wooded banks ; the water, the foliage, the golden color of the rocks, the vessels that passed from time to time, all formed a picture "made to wish for the pleasure of the eyes."

"Let us go in," said Julianne to the young people, after they had admired it fully.

Docilely they took the road to the house, walking before Julianne, whom her garrulous and lame companion stopped at every step. In the golden haze, the trees looked like a fairy scene ; the light costumes of the women, in the gardens and on the lawns of houses

hidden in a nest of verdure, were like great flowers in full bloom ; an impression of freshness, of sweetness, and of silence descended from the hill-side, as they withdrew from the banks of the river.

"Mademoiselle," said Albert—a turn in the road hid them from those who were following—you doubtless know what I wish. I have no desire more dear to me than to live and die beside you."

Aline listened. Who can tell the impression produced by such words on the heart of a young girl who hears them for the first time ? The mixture of triumph and timidity, of bashfulness and joy which sends a delicate rose-color to her cheeks, which places over her eyes a veil of modesty ? Dorsay had said to her formerly, "I love you" ; but how false the recollection of these words rung in Aline's memory beside this sincerity of accent, this loyalty of words ! So false had it sounded, that it still brought to Mademoiselle Breton's forehead the blush of a retrospective shame.

"Mademoiselle," resumed Albert, "my mother loves you."

"Monsieur," said Aline, taking her courage in both hands, "I must make you a confession. I have been infatuated with myself. I have thought myself more intelligent and more capable than any one else ; I have misunderstood my mother, and disdained her friends ; I have had the idea of making a brilliant marriage ; and for six months my thoughts were turned almost solely in that direction. The man whom I had chosen was a dishonest man ; already undeceived, I believed he was only selfish—but he was worse than that. Monsieur, now that you know this, do you still think me worthy to be your wife ?"

She had spoken straight on, courageously ; but, as she advanced in her statement, her voice weakened ; at the last word she stopped in her walk, for her limbs refused to carry her farther. Albert had grown pale, and his brown eyes shone strangely in his colorless face.

"Pardon my question," said he ; "your frankness excuses mine. This man—did you love him?"

"No!" replied Aline, without hesitation. "No, I did not love him ! If I had loved him, on the day when I learned that he was a dishonest man I should have died of shame ; I told my mother so, and it was true. If I had loved him, monsieur, I would not have spoken to you about it ! I should have kept my secret ; and we would not have been here, neither you nor I !"

She looked him well in the face, her eyes shining with pride.

"Mademoiselle," said Albert, "I believe in you, and I ask you to believe in me."

"You are going away ; if, on your return, you have not changed your mind, I will try to be a good wife to you. I have not been a good daughter to my mother ; but I have felt my shortcomings."

Julienne and the gouty person were now but a few paces behind them ; and they resumed their walk slowly, without exchanging another word, except here and there some indifferent remark. The sun, already sunk behind the woods, gilded the tops of the tall poplars in the straight avenue which they were climbing ; the swallows were crossing the blue sky, with their sharp cries and the rapid motion of their wings ; there was over all this a feeling of profound intimacy ; one would have said that the walls of verdure drew closer together in order to bring them nearer each other.

"In two months," said Albert, "and then for life!"

"For life!" repeated Aline sweetly and with wonder.

She comprehended that her youth had only been a preparation, and that existence opened itself out before her with wide doors.

When they arrived at the garden-gate, the gouty person left them, excusing himself for having detained them. They pushed the gate open and came upon the terrace.

Madame Reynard met her son's look, and her face brightened.

"Well! my little girl," said Monsieur Leroy to Aline, "have you had a good walk?"

Without answering, Aline went to the jasmine which was flourishing in all its glory, covering the house to the top with its little perfumed stars. She gathered two or three sprigs, which she placed in her mother's breast.

"Grandfather," said she, "do you remember? You told me that this flower was the emblem of my mother. I did not understand it then; but now I comprehend."

"And the jasmine resembles the stars. A small light," said Monsieur Leroy, softly, "a little lamp which brightens the hearth, a little flower which perfumes the garden—and one is happy if one can be, into the bargain."

"And one is happy anyhow!" said Albert, coming up to the old man and pressing his hand.

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THE END.

END OF VOL. I

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